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[“THERE’S TROUBLE TO COME OF IT,” EXCLAIMED MRS. VENN!]

EILEEN’S ROMANCE.

CHAPTER III.

ADAM GOLDSMITH was a very great favourite with the Vivian family. They had not known him very long. A few years since they had met him while travelling in Germany; an intimacy sprang up, and when, a few months later, he returned to England, the Earl and Countess welcomed him as a friend.

It was, perhaps, their countenance which made his acceptance by London society so easy, for few men ever had his history. All people knew of Mr. Goldsmith was that he had been partner in a great banking bank, had made a lot of money, and had now retired from business. He seemed to have no relations. When questioned indirectly he said his father had died before he was twenty, and that he could not remember his mother. He had been educated entirely in Germany, had travelled half over the world, was a kind-

hearted, sensible man, a little too practical and business-like, perhaps, for fashionable folks, but with a strain of generosity and lofty feeling which redeemed him from the commonplace.

Lady Vivian told him he ought to marry, and offered to find him a wife. He replied, with a smile, he had never had time to think of such things, and that he thought he would rather do the flogging himself.

Not deterred, my lady was always filling her house with pretty faces, and introducing their owners to Mr. Goldsmith; but, till the arrival of Maude Desmond, no tittle of success had crowned her efforts.

May, who was openly amused at her mother’s match-making, declared Mr. Goldsmith was not in the least in love with Miss Desmond—that he seemed to regard her as some living enigma which it behoved him to study. Still, it must be confessed, he sought her society a great deal, and Lady Vivian’s hopes ran high.

Lord Desmond’s momentary faintness soon passed off. He returned to the house with his hostess, and Adam Goldsmith proceeded

with Maude on the ramble so strangely interrupted.

“Your father does not look strong?”

“I think Yorkshire does not suit papa. I can’t bear to think of his spending a winter here.”

“But it is his native county.”

“He has been away from it nineteen years. My grandfather was so angry at his second marriage that he banished him from Desmondville. He would have received him again when his wife died, but papa refused. He said he would never accept the hospitality that had been refused to her.”

“I like that,” said Goldsmith, warmly. “Surely you must be proud of such devotion to your mother!”

Maude opened her eyes, and by her next speech spoilt any chance she might have had of being Mrs. Goldsmith.

“She was not my mother. My mother was Lord Harley’s daughter. Papa actually married a mere nobody after her death—a person who had been engaged as my governess. My aunt selected her when mamma died, little thinking what was to come of it!”

Mr. Goldsmith looked on the ground.
"Do you mean that the second Mrs. Desmond was uneducated or uncultivated?"

"She had been educated for a governess. I can just remember her—a pretty, silly sort of face, just like Eileen's. My father was literally infatuated with her. He might have married anybody, and he actually chose this little unknown nursery governess. Of course, it blighted his whole future!"

"Then you don't approve of romantic marriages?"

Miss Desmond hesitated. Certainly, if she became Mrs. Goldsmith it would not be a romantic match. She recollected this, and took courage.

"I think no woman ought to let a man sacrifice his prospects for her sake. It is a poor way of showing love!"

"And the other way. Do you think a man may expect the woman he marries to sacrifice ought for him? Supposing disgrace—as the world terms it—or loss of caste would follow on her becoming his wife, what then?"

Maudie shook her head.

"I am not romantic, Mr. Goldsmith. I think no two people should marry without mutual respect and esteem. Unions which entail sacrifices are best not carried out!"

"Perhaps you are right," said her companion, slowly.

They went into lunch, and some strange error planted Mr. Goldsmith—whose rightful place was next Maudie—between Lady May and her little friend. He talked to Eileen with the cordial ease a middle-aged man may show to a pretty child; but Mr. Courtenay, who was on her other side, considered he took up too much of her attention. The rest of the day passed swiftly without any special event, only when Eileen and her father were driving home, Lord Desmond asked suddenly,—

"Eileen, what did you think of Mr. Goldsmith?"

"I liked him," returned the girl, simply. "He seems so true. I could not imagine his breaking his word."

But two days later Miss Desmond returned to her family in the most amiable mood, for the great banker had gone home without asking the question she had expected. Moreover, the last day or two he had avoided her company, and his farewell was so cold and formal; she began to fear her ray visions of sharing his wealth had been premature. Maudie's temper at this time was so trying that Eileen and her father would have been thankful to the Vivians for inviting her again. Tony and Mrs. Ball came in for a full share of the beauty's displeasure. In short, the domestic atmosphere of Desmondville was very breezy, and a great wave of relief came to Maudie's family when she announced that her aunt, Mrs. Westwood, wished for her company at Ventnor.

"Is there a Mr. Westwood?" asked Eileen of her father, as they discussed the news, "or is she a widow?"

"Mrs. Westwood is a widow, but she has one son. He and Maudie were brought up as brother and sister."

"What a pity!" echoed Eileen, mournfully. "Papa, I can't help it, but I do wish someone would marry Maudie! You and I should get into a great many scrapes without her, but we should be much happier!"

Lord Desmond shook his head at this high treason; but yet, when the beauty was fairly off, a great fear fell on the old house.

Eileen and her father were always happy together, and friends came to see them—May Delaval often, her cousin often still. Basil had established his right to haunt Desmondville, and he was always welcome. Had he not saved Eileen's life; and did not that give him a claim to her father's gratitude?

He was very soon going to leave Yorkshire for his sister's wedding; but first there was to be a grand ball at the Court, and to this ball Lady Vivian insisted on Eileen's coming, overruling all Lord Desmond's scruples, and

telling the child herself that she had set her heart on her making her *début* at her house. So, as Eileen's wishes were all with Lady Vivian—and Lord Desmond could never bring himself to deny her a pleasure—the little lady and her trunk were driven over to the Court two days before the ball, that she might help the Countess and May in their preparations.

The dress was very simple—white lace. Old Mrs. Ball had unearthed a chest of bygone grandeur for her favourite's benefit, and no modern triumph of milliner's art could have suited the slight figure better than the robe of old lace, fastened with trailing ivy—ivy leaves nestling in the bright hair, and forming a necklace and bracelet for the snowy throat and arms.

"I am almost afraid to look at you!" said May, fondly. "You are so like a fairy, I am afraid of you vanishing away!"

Eileen Desmond was the fairest of all the fair girls at Lady Vivian's ball.

As she came into the vast hall at her aunt's side Basil's thoughts went back to the August morning at Boulogne, when he had striven with death for her possession, and prevailed. It was but two months ago, yet she was changed. She was a child no longer, but a beautiful girl, whom many men would love and covet for their own.

He was as poor as he well could be. His one dream of prosperity was a wealthy marriage. Nothing else could redeem his position and give him the place in the world that should have been his birthright. Eileen was portionless; nay, though a peer's daughter, she was unknown. She could bring as dowry neither money, lands, nor grand connections, only her own sweet face. And yet, as he watched her walk up the long ballroom at her aunt's side Basil knew the truth. In spite of the maxims he had been brought up to believe, in spite of the doctrine impressed on him from childhood, that it was his duty to "marry money," he knew that in all the world he should never love another creature as he loved Eileen. She was his heart's choice, his best and dearest!

Eighteen and twenty-six, both old families, both with good looks, health, and intellect; but for one fatal obstacle they seemed made for each other. That one sad drawback was money!

He loved her, but he could not offer her a house; he loved her, but he could not give her the things most women regard as essential to their happiness.

She was so young, almost a child. Would it be cruel to seek her love, to ask her to wait for him until he had something to offer her not, indeed, even then wealth, but sufficient for a simple home-life?

She was eighteen. In three years' time his pay would be increased to a sum which, little as it sounded in fashionable ears, had yet been proved sufficient for men to marry on.

Could he ask her to wait, to give up all chance of wealth and title, to wait in poverty for three long years, and then marry an officer whose scanty income would be just enough for bare necessities?

He was to dance the first waltz with her. Eileen wondered at his silence. He hardly spoke at all. The poor child wondered if she had displeased him!

It was her first ball. She had looked forward to it for days and nights, yet it would lose all charm for her if her hero frowned.

Basil led her out on to the terrace when it was over, and walked, still in silence, to a conservatory which ran at the further end. There was no one there—they were quite alone.

"Are you vexed that I have brought you here, Eileen? Do you want to go back to the dancing?"

She nodded her head.

"I would rather stay here."

"Do you know that I am going away next week? Shall you miss me just a little, Eileen?"

"I shall miss you terribly."

"Dear," and the strong man's voice faltered as it had never done before. "Perhaps I ought to go away in silence, and not seek to know my fate, but I am no hero, Eileen. I cannot leave you without telling you all you are to me. I have loved you, I think, ever since that morning at Boulogne. You are dearer to me than any human creature. You are so bright and beautiful, my darling; you deserve a duke's coronet, and I am a poor man; only I love you, Eileen, better, I think, than life itself."

There was no answer. Her soft violet eyes were fixed on the ground; she could not raise them to his face.

"Dear," went on the young man, bravely. "I must not deceive you. I am what the world calls a shockingly bad match. I am so poor, Eileen, that I could not make a home for you until I get my promotion in three years' time, and then it would not be such a home as I should like to give you. Eileen, could you give up riches and honours just for me?"

"You forget," said Eileen. "They are not mine to give up, but if they were I should still think love best."

"And you will try to love me, my own?"

She raised her eyes then, and gave him one long, tender glance.

"I don't need to try," she whispered. "You saved my life, and to whom should I give it but you?"

"And you are not afraid of poverty?"

"I have been poor all my life, and it has not made me unhappy. Only, are you sure? I am nothing but Eileen, and you are wise and great!"

Basil smiled.

"I want only Eileen," he answered her. "And for the rest, sweetheart, I am neither rich nor great. I am a soldier, and I try to do my duty to my country, but many do it better. We Courtenays have always been soldiers, and always done our best in our profession; but, Eileen, I shall work now as I never worked before, because it is for you. The hope that each day brings me nearer to you, that each day hastens the time when you will be my own, must speed me on."

They were both standing; his face was half hidden on his breast, and her fingers toyed with one of the buttons of his coat.

"Mr. Courtenay."

He smiled.

"Couldn't you say Basil, Eileen?"

"Basil, then. Are you quite sure you know?" pleaded the child. "I have lived abroad all my life. I don't know any of the things that come naturally to English girls. Maudie says I am very stupid."

"Never mind Maudie."

"And," the cheeks flushed crimson, but she persevered bravely, "did your sister tell you about—the *établissement*?"

"Yes," returned Basil, quickly. "My dear, why should you think of that? Who could blame you for working hard for your father's sake?"

"I never thought it wrong—oh, never! But when Maudie came she said it was terrible, and that an English girl would have worked her fingers to the bone rather than have done it."

"Forget Maudie!" commanded Basil. "Never think of her unkind words. Eileen, sweetheart, believe me, the Heaven who gave you your voice meant you to use it for your father's sake if needs were. I cannot bear the thought that you should have had to do so, but there was no shame in it, dear!"

"And you don't mind?"

He was a proud man, and the question was a difficult one; but his answer was all tenderness.

"Supposing you were back at Boulogne now, dear, and had promised to be my wife, I should not like the thought of your singing to every *cavalcade* who could afford the trifling admission sum. But, Eileen, in the old time, when your father was poor and needed help, I think you was right; I do, indeed."

She smiled as one relieved from a great fear.

"He has loved me so," she said. "Other girls have mothers, and lots of friends and relations. I had no one in the world but my father, and yet he was so good he never let me miss what I had not."

"Do you think he will give you to me, Eileen?"

Eileen trembled.

"Must you ask him?"

"My child, you surely would not leave him in ignorance? Sweetheart, don't you know you have promised to be my wife? I must tell your father and my own."

"Oh, no!" pleaded the girl. "You know you said—here she blushed crimson—"we must wait a long, long time. Why need we tell anybody?"

"But, Eileen," remonstrated Basil, "people always tell their friends when they are engaged. Just think of all the people who will dance with you and talk to you while I am away! Don't you think it's very unfair to them not to let them know the prize is won?"

Eileen shook her head.

"I would promise never to dance at all if you liked—never to speak to a stranger; but, oh! please do not tell my father."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Oh, no."

"Do you think he would be indignant at the presumption of a needy soldier in wishing to be his son-in-law?"

"No."

"What then? Let me hear your reasons, Eileen?"

"Papa is kindness itself," said Eileen, slowly, "and when we are alone he does just what I like."

"Little, I grant."

She shook her head.

"But he is very different when Maude is at home. In Boulogne he never paid any attention to what she said, but here he seems to be influenced by her. He told me once when I cried about something that I did not understand English ways. Papa likes you, and he would be glad for me to be happy; but I am sure if you told him he would tell Maude."

"Then your real fears are of Miss Desmond?"

"Is it very foolish?" asked poor Eileen, trembling. "I am dreadfully frightened of her. I always have been. I feel quite brave away from her, but when she looks at me with her cold, black eyes, I feel fit to tremble."

"And you think she would object to me?"

"I don't think Maude would ever let me be engaged to anyone," confessed Eileen.

"But why? Surely she has not turned Roman Catholic, and wishes to shut you up in a convent?"

"Oh, no—but there are nine years between us."

"I should never have guessed it. Miss Desmond would pass anywhere for one or two-and-twenty!"

"She cannot bear to be thought old. Everyone about here knows she was seven or eight when my mother was married. That is why she always keeps me in the background. She speaks of me to strangers as a mere child. Now you see if I were engaged—"

"I understand. 'Mere children' don't get engaged; but, Eileen, I think you are wrong. I don't like your sister. I never have, but I believe she would far rather you were engaged to a pauper like myself than that she should see you a peeress. I really think she would welcome the news of our betrothal, since it would make her sure you would be debarred from any very grand match."

"I would rather not."

"But, Eileen, I can't keep this from Lord Desmond! I should deserve the hardest things anyone could say of me if I wooed his daughter and did not tell him."

She yielded the point then, only she looked at him with a kind of prophetic sadness in her eyes.

"It is all true that you say, and I daresay I am foolish, only I am so afraid of Maude. I seem to feel that trouble will come out of her knowing."

"Dear," said Basil, gently, "what trouble can come between us while we love each other?"

"I don't know—only people who love as truly as we do are parted sometimes. And I am afraid—"

"You will never do for a soldier's wife if you are so frightened!" said Basil, fondly.

"Eileen, I shall ride over early to-morrow and speak to your father. Then I hope to bring you his consent. In three days' time I shall have to go home for Lucy's wedding. When that is over I must tell my parents I have found them another daughter instead of the one they have lost."

"And if they are angry?"

Basil was pretty certain they would be, but he had no notion of letting Eileen guess this.

"They will be very fond of you when they know you, and three years will soon slip by. You are sure you will not be tired of waiting? You will be true to me, Eileen, my darling!"

"I will be true to you always!"

They might have stayed in the conservatory for hours; but Lady May, suspecting the state of affairs, and feeling some less sympathetic person might interrupt them, came herself to find Eileen, and tell her her partners were in desperation. When Eileen and her squire were moving in the mazes of a quadrille, May Delaval drew her cousin back to the terrace.

"I thought it was going to happen!" she began, without the least preamble; "but you know you have been terribly rash."

"I shall look to you, May, to help me with the home people. You will tell them Eileen is a darling, and that they must be fond of her!"

"Then it is settled!"

"I shall go and see Lord Desmond to-morrow!"

"But it can't be for years."

"I suppose not for three years; but, of course, I must speak to her father."

"I shouldn't."

"May!"

"If you were given to falling in love and repenting, I would say speak to him," said Lady May, slowly; "but as I can trust you perfectly, Basil, as I know you will be as true to Eileen as though you had already married her, I think it madness to speak to her father about an engagement that cannot come off for years."

"I don't understand you!"

"Lord Desmond is a peculiar man. He loves Eileen; but he fears Maude, so it is easy to see which sister has the most influence over him."

"But why should Maude object?"

"She hates Eileen pretty cordially; besides, she is too vain to let a sister nine years her junior be engaged first. If you were very rich, and could lavish jewels on Eileen—if you were able to give her elder sister a season in London, and the run of a country house—why, then I think Maude would conquer her pride, and permit the marriage; but as it is, I am sure she will interfere."

"But what can she do?"

"Make mischief!" said Lady May, with a sparkle in the dark brown eyes which had done so much mischief last season.

"I can trust Eileen!"

"So can I; but, remember, there are your own family to think of. I know Aunt Constance has a slight acquaintance with Mrs. Westwood. Maude may be invited to the Grange in her aunt's train, and give a very unflattering report of Eileen."

"Do you mean she is Mrs. Westwood's niece, Cyril's cousin?" he asked, quickly.

"Even so," returned May.

"She can say nothing against her," observed Basil, doggedly; but it was clear he regretted Maude's relationship to the Westwoods.

"Nothing that weighs with us who know her; but she can represent her sister as a little hoyden, who knows nothing of ladies' society, and a bold intriguing girl, who sang at a French music hall."

Basil winced.

"But that would reflect on herself!"

"Not at all. The whole world knows that Lord Desmond was twice married, and that all his friends were irate at his second choice. Mrs. Westwood adopted her niece only because she objected to her stepmother."

Basil shrugged his shoulders.

"I never knew you so unkind."

"That is not fair. I love Eileen dearly. I believe you could not have a fairer, sweeter wife; but I see clouds ahead, and I believe you will rue the day you speak to Lord Desmond."

"I thought you liked him!"

"I do; but he is as weak as water!"

Everyone declared Lady Vernon's ball was a great success. It was in the small morning hours that Eileen went to bed—a strange, rapturous happiness filling her heart that Basil Courtenay loved her.

There are some natures—Heaven help them if deceived—to whom love means all; who count fame or rank, wealth, or luxury, as just nothing compared to love.

Such an one was Eileen Desmond. Love was the loadstone of her life. Love had changed her from a child to a woman, and her fresh, young heart had been given in its pure, first choice to Basil Courtenay.

She knew that he was poor, that years might pass before he could claim her—all this was nothing to her—all she craved was his love.

It was strange that Eileen, in her utter ignorance of worldly wisdom, and Lady May, with the prudence and quick foresight of one experienced in fashionable ways, should yet have asked Basil the same thing—not to speak to Lord Desmond of the engagement. It was stranger still that, loving Eileen as his very life, and trusting May completely, he should yet have persisted in his purpose; but Basil's obstinacy was only due to his pride and love for his little fiancée.

Honourable and upright as the day he would not because she was poor and unknown, cast on her even the suspicion of a slight.

He knew his love for her would stand the tests of time and absence; but she should not be placed in a false position. Her father should know she was to be Mrs. Courtenay as soon as his promotion came, and Lady Constance and Sir Brian must learn that all their plans for providing their heir with a wealthy bride were vain, since Basil had made up his mind to marry a girl whose face was her fortune.

Many of the guests breakfasted in their own rooms the morning after the ball, but Lady May was pouring out coffee in the usual place at ten o'clock; and Eileen Desmond, a shy, tremulous look of happiness in her blue eyes, sat by her friend's side.

Basil saw them thus as he came in—the girl his parents desired for a daughter-in-law, and the child they would be called on to welcome in her stead; and he told himself that in grace and sweetness, in refinement and breeding, Eileen was everything they could desire.

He sat down by her side, but several people were at the table, and he had no chance of a word on any but indifferent topics.

May Delaval, who had a wondrous feeling for lovers, waited till the meal was over, and then said pointedly to her cousin,—

"I want to speak to you before you go for your ride, Basil. Come to me in my boudoir, please."

He obeyed willingly enough, and found as he expected, not the heiress but her little friend.

"Is it really true, Eileen?" he asked faintly. "Was it not some happy dream. Are you sure you can wait three years for a penniless soldier?"

"You must not disparage yourself like that," said Eileen. "You know you are my

hero, and I shall be true to you always while you want me."

"And I may tell Lord Desmond that your happiness is in this engagement as well as mine?"

The child raised her eyes to his face, and for the last time tried to dissuade him from his purpose.

"Basil, must you tell him?"

Basil shook his head.

"Ask me anything else, my darling, and I will do it for you gladly, but not this. I cannot have the suspicion of a slight cast on you, Eileen, even at your own desire."

Frankly, Mr. Courtenay thought both Eileen and Lady May a little morbid on this subject. As he rode over to Desmondville he argued the matter again with himself, and decided the strange fear they showed of Maude was simply prejudice.

He was willing to grant Miss Desmond disliked her little sister, and that she had some influence over her father, but it must be to her interest to see Eileen provided for. Had he trusted Maude and been on intimate terms with her, she might possibly have made mischief between him and his little love. As it was, disguising her pretty nature, and, thoroughly understanding her feeling for Eileen, he would not be influenced by anything she might say.

From Maude his thoughts went to her father.

Basil Courtenay was very much in love. He was prepared, for Eileen's sake, to brave his family's anger, and risk a life of poverty; but even for Eileen's sake he could not heartily like Lord Desmond. It seemed to him the man was weak, selfish, and cowardly. He had given up home and country for his wife's sake, but that one effort seemed to have exhausted his energy.

In nineteen years he had never done a stroke of work, and had been content for two of them to let his own child toil for his support, returned to his native land, once more Desmond of Desmondville. His pride of birth seemed to return, and he was ready to reproach the child of his exile because she was not in all things like a fashionable young lady, and to submit herself in all things to the rule of his elder daughter.

"If only we could be married now," was the result of Basil's cogitations. "I would take Eileen away and save her any miserable discussions; but I suppose it would be madness. We must wait till I get my step, but three years won't be a very large piece of our lives after all."

He rode through the South Lodge, Mrs. Venn holding the gate open for him, and inquiring with wonderful civility after Miss Eileen.

"She's quite well," said Basil cheerfully.

"I expect you'll see her home again to-morrow."

"Take her away," said the old crone knowingly, "and there's not much worth having left I'm thinking."

"I quite agree with you, old lady."

Mrs. Venn nodded her head, and went on in a dreary tone, more as one speaking to herself.

"But there's trouble to come of it, trouble to come of it. It runs in the blood, it runs in the blood."

Basil half-shuddered at this gloomy prediction, and tried to shake off the impression it had made upon him by quickening his pace, and reaching the house at a gallop. Tony came to take the horse, and informed Mr. Courtenay my lord was in the library.

There Basil found him, the table strewn with papers and memoranda. Never a man more given to pouring over figures than Lord Desmond; the pity was his labours produced so little visible results.

He started up in astonishment at the sight of his visitor, and looked more alarmed than pleased.

"Nothing the matter at the Court, I hope? Eileen quite well?"

"Perfectly," replied Basil, quietly. "My

errand is on business. I am leaving Yorkshire to-morrow."

The shadow fled from Lord Desmond's brow.

"Ah, yes. Your sister's wedding. I remember hearing of it from Eileen. It's a long journey from here to Blankshire, but I suppose, at your age, you don't mind it?"

"I could not let Lucy be married without being there if I were anywhere in England, and Blankshire is not quite the end of the world."

"Pretty near it," replied Lord Desmond. "My elder daughter is somewhere in the neighbourhood. Her aunt grew tired of Ventnor, so they have left the Isle of Wight, and are now travelling in the south of England."

"I want to speak to you, Lord Desmond, about one of your daughters. Will you give me Eileen?"

The weary, careworn face lighted up at the sound of that favourite name.

In spite of all the misery that came afterwards, Basil Courtenay always felt certain that this errand, broken-down peer, unworthy as he might be, yet really loved his youngest child.

"You want to marry Eileen!" said Lord Desmond, slowly, "and it is but the other day she was a child nursing a doll. How time passes!"

This was hardly satisfactory.

"She is not a child now," returned Basil, gravely. "Besides, unfortunately, I am not yet in a position to marry. We must wait, perhaps, three years, certainly two. All I ask now is your consent to our engagement. I have heard of your attachment to her mother. Surely you, who made a love-match yourself, cannot separate us because I am unable to give Eileen the wealth she would adorn?"

"I don't want wealth for Eileen," said Lord Desmond, slowly. "She is her mother's child, and would not value it; but I would far rather she married in a humbler position of life!"

Basil stared at him.

"I hardly understand you! My father is a baronet of old family, but very slender means. You are a peer of whom the same might be said. Surely, therefore, in position Eileen and I are well matched?"

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"It killed her mother! My wife faded away, I verily believe, from the unkindness and slights heaped on her after our marriage. I want her child to have a happier fate!"

"You cannot think I would let unkindness or slights touch my wife?"

"You couldn't help it. Do you think I meant sorrow to touch my wife? Do you think I would not have given my life—though that was not worth much—to save her grief? I was powerless; and so I believe you would be!"

"The cases are hardly parallel!" said Basil, coldly. "You married a nursery governess. My wife will be the daughter of an English peer!"

Lord Desmond shook his head.

"My wife was the child of a brave English officer; a man who died fighting for his country, and had received the Victoria Cross. I don't think I am a parent deservng of half so much respect. I like you, Mr. Courtenay, and I don't forget you saved my daughter's life; but I am very sorry you should have come to me on such an errand!"

Basil felt indignant.

"Surely you do not expect to keep Eileen unmarried all her days because of your somewhat romantic fears for her happiness?"

"I always wished her to marry; but I believe there are only two classes of men with whom she would be happy."

"May I inquire the needful qualifications?"

"You need not be sarcastic, sir. If Eileen married a professional man with a moderate competency I believe he would win a treasure!"

"I claim to be a professional man, and I

hope in three years to have a moderate competency."

"But you are a baronet's son and an earl's nephew. It is impossible but that the question, 'Who was she?' should be raised about your wife. Besides, the whole world knows Sir Bryan depends on your marrying an heiress. It is my belief, from what I have gathered of your parents, they would feel aggrieved if you married an angel from heaven unless she had a substantial fortune!"

"A man cannot select his wife to please his parents. And surely you do not doubt my love for Eileen?"

"I don't. I believe you would be true to her; but if she married you I think your relations would make her feel she had ruined your prospects."

"I think you are hard on us both!"

"I am not hard on her. She is the joy of my life. And yet, if a suitable man proposed, I would give her up to-morrow."

"And the wooer is to be a plain man, of moderate income?" said Basil, sarcastically.

"Either that, or one of such wealth that he is independent of the world's opinion; and his choice, instead of being criticised and sneered at, will be run after and admired just because he has married her."

Basil Courtenay looked sharply at Lord Desmond.

"Perhaps you have such a man in your mind."

"It is possible."

"Then you send me away, not because of your scruples about Eileen's happiness, but because you have fixed on a richer son-in-law."

"You wrong me," returned Noel Desmond quietly. "To begin with, I have not sent you away."

"You have refused your consent to our engagement."

"I shall never stand in the way of Eileen's happiness. You say yourself you cannot marry her for three years?"

"Perhaps two."

"Perhaps two," corrected Lord Desmond. "I utterly refuse to let my child be bound to you for that time—to subject her to the censure of your lady-mother, and perhaps the remonstrances of Sir Bryan. I may be poor, but I too, have my pride. It shall never be said I took advantage of a passing fancy to make sure of the heir of the Courtenays as a son-in-law."

"I don't understand," said Basil, hoarsely. "First you say you have not sent me away. In the next breath you declare you will not let Eileen be engaged to me."

Lord Desmond shrugged his shoulders.

"Come back when you are ready to marry her, and if she says 'Yes,' be sure I will not object, but I won't have it called an engagement."

"And if I get my promotion sooner?"

"If you got it next week come back next week. I can't speak in plainer terms. The day you are able to marry my child that day I will consent to your engagement with her, but I will not leave her a prey to the unkind remarks of your family, and the wear-and-tear of public opinion for three long years."

"And you will be kind to her? You will not press her to give me up?"

"I was never unkind to her in my life, and I shall probably never mention this conversation to her. You can tell her so much of it as you think fit."

Basil rode back to the Court with a strange sense of disappointment. He had nerved himself to bear his mother's tears and his father's anger, when they heard of their disappointment. He had felt strong to defend Eileen from the censure he knew they would heap on her. He had been ready to describe his darling in eloquent words, and paint her beauty in glowing terms, and lo! none of this was required. He might go home without the fear of regrets and expostulations; he could fill his usual place, and receive the smiling approval always meted out to him. It would

be just as though that scene in the conservatory had never been. He met May Delaval in the grounds, and a groom appearing to take his horse he followed her to the house.

"Everyone else has lunched long ago, but it is waiting for you. The mother has taken Eileen for a drive, so you need not hurry. Sit down and refresh yourself bodily, while you tell me how you have sped."

"May," said Basil, quickly. "I sometimes think you are a witch. I mean you have the most marvellous knack of guessing things no one else suspects. I want you, before I say a word, to tell me your opinion of Lord Desmond?"

"It won't agree with yours. I like him, and you don't."

"Still tell it me."

"I like him," said May, "because I think his is a great character spoiled by weakness. If he had met Eileen's mother, and married her when he was young, I believe he would have been a great man."

"My dear, he couldn't. When Lord Desmond married his first wife her successor was a little child."

"I know. Mother has told me how unhappy he was with Maude's mother—how for years they had no children; and when at last the little girl came, Mrs. Desmond hated her because she could not inherit the title. Mother says the fourteen years of his first marriage spoiled Lord Desmond utterly; that is why I like him. I can't help being sorry that when he had found someone to love he lost her so soon."

"He told me the alights poured out on her broke her heart, and that he won't have such a fate for Eileen. In a word, May, it is not to be an engagement at all, but if ever I am rich enough to keep a wife I may go and ask for her."

"I don't call that hard."

"May!"

"Why?" said May, sweetly. "You can trust each other. Eileen will know you are working for her, and the moment you can keep a wife you will return; and, surely, the thought of that child waiting and hoping in her quiet home will keep you true to her!"

"I shall be true to her while life lasts!"

"She is going home to-morrow, as soon as we have started for London. I will manage that you see her alone to-night."

"Heaven bless you, May!"

They stood together that evening in Lady May's own boudoir—the two who loved each other, and who hoped some day to spend their lives together.

"It seems hard," said Basil, sadly. "We should have been so happy. Your father might have trusted me."

"I trust you."

"Sweetheart!"

"And you know, Basil, I think I'm glad its like this—glad that you are not bound to me. If we had been engaged like other people—even if you had grown tired—you might have married me just because everyone expected it; but now, if you come back to me, I shall know it is because you love me."

"Why 'if,' Eileen, if you trust me?"

She clung to him a little closer.

"I do trust you, Basil, and yet I seem to feel we shall never be married. I think you know that when two people love each other as we do it would be almost too great happiness to spend their lives together."

"You trust me, Eileen, and I have faith in you. What, then, could part us?"

"I don't know."

But she was trembling, and Basil took her into his arms and kissed her, his heart just then pretty sore against Lord Desmond.

"See," said Eileen, taking a soft, creamy rose from the bosom of her dress. "I will give you this, and if ever you are tired—if ever you are sorry for what you have said to me—you shall send it back. It might be hard to write that you had changed, but if I see my rose returned I shall understand."

He took the flower and put it carefully—tenderly almost—in his pocket-book.

"It will never come back to you, sweet heart!" he said, gently. "Some day, when there is a plain gold ring on this little finger, I shall show it to you, and we shall laugh together then over your doubts."

(To be continued.)

A DESPERATE DEED.

—101—

CHAPTER XVIII.

FIVE hundred pounds! It rang in her ears like a knell—over and over. Five hundred pounds! And to-morrow would be Friday. To-morrow had she promised to meet him—to give him five hundred pounds! Three hundred, out of her own pin-money, had she on hand. But the other two?

There was music and singing and light talk going on in the cream and gold drawing-room, but a little apart from the others the Countess sat, her dark head bowed over the book of stichings on her lap.

Of course she could ask Harold for the sum. He would give it to her instantly and unquestioningly. But he might wonder for what purpose she required it, and she dreaded the birth of suspicion in his mind.

She must not fail to secure it. Not that Daroy could really injure her—the Countess of Silverdale was above all possible humiliation—but she dreaded that he would seek the Earl and insist on telling the story of her sister's shame. He was so intensely proud, he would feel it terribly. No, poor Marguerite's secret must be kept! But the extra two hundred pounds!

The Earl, talking with one of the Dallas girls across the room, and every now and then sending furtive glances in her direction, thought, as he caught a glimpse of her pale, weary face, that she did not look as happy as she used to a few short months ago.

Could it be that she thought he was failing in devotion, love?

As soon as he could in courtesy leave his companion, he crossed over to his wife.

She looked up at him with a faint smile.

"Dear heart, what a sad face!" he whispered.

"I think you need brightening up. If you had more young people—merry people—around you all the time, you would feel better. You grieve too much for Marguerite."

She did not lift her dark-fringed lids.

Ah, yes she did grieve for her! Was not the weight of Marguerite's woe always heavy on her heart? Poor Marguerite!

"Hush!" she murmured. "Listen—Iva is going to sing."

The Earl's heart warmed to his wife as he noted what a fond look she gave her step-daughter.

Iva, walking towards the piano, met the wistful glance.

"What shall it be, mamma?" she called, brightly.

No sickly sentimentalist was this daughter of Lord Silverdale—just a very lovely, very healthy, very happy girl! And so her cheeks were pink as apple-blossoms in May; her deep blue eyes full of brilliance; the smiles and dimples swift to come.

"Sing 'My love is like a red, red rose.'"

She sat down and struck the opening chords with a light and brilliant touch. And then her rich sweet voice rose in the pretty, old Scotch song.

And Lionel, bending over the rack and turning her music, thought that no rose which ever "sprang in June" was half as delicately glowing, as fair, as sweet, as this golden-haired girl in the dove-grey cashmere gown who sat and sang the charming ballad.

Hers was the blush of early summer; hers the perfume, the subtle, indescribable perfume of high birth and good breeding.

And deep in his heart, almost unconsciously, the young fellow echoed the tender, saucy words of the song:

"So fair art thou, my bonnie love,
So deep in love am I,
That I will love you still, my dear,
Till all the seas gang dry."

It was finished. There was a murmurous little storm of applause.

A few minutes later, Iva found herself near Sir Geoffrey Damyn. A certain warmth came into his languid gaze as their eyes met.

"Oh, to see or hear her singing, scarce I know which is divinest?" he quoted, in a low voice.

"Thank you!" she cried, as she passed on.

And Geoffrey Damyn turned his attention again to the Countess.

Whenever he could do so without being observed, without apparent rudeness, he watched her intently. The fascination her face held for him was extraordinary. He could not help looking at her. Involuntarily his glance sought her. That most marvellous resemblance! It seemed to increase, if possible, rather than diminish.

Marguerite's hair had been lighter than was that of the Earl's wife. She was gayer, merrier, too, more full of spirit and life; but the voice, the smile, the trick of attitude, these were identical.

The more he looked the more earnest grew his expression. His black eyes seemed striving to burn into her very soul.

In his absorption, he did not perceive that Lord Silverdale, apparently chatting lightly with Nora Dallas, was, in reality, keenly observing him.

"Confound the fellow!" thought his lordship, savagely. "What does he mean by glaring so at Lila? Is he falling in love with her? Beastly bad form, such a stare! If he were not my guest I'd feel tempted to give him a thrashing!"

But, pshaw! Damyn was a gentleman. He had got into a reverie. His scrutiny was probably the blank gaze of far-off thoughts; and Lillian was remarkably pretty. He could not expect his friend would be blind to that fact.

But just as he had cheerfully accepted his own logic, he saw his wife, as though compelled to do so, slowly turn, lift her eyes and look full into those of Geoffrey Damyn lounging by the hearth. And he saw, too, the blood rush to her cheeks in a crimson flood, then fade away, leaving her white as ashes.

He compressed his lips till they showed just a livid line in his burnished beard. Why, in the name of Heaven, did his guest honour the Countess with such profound and piercing attention? Why should she blush so burningly when her glance met his?

"And you really think we will have skating this winter, Lord Silverdale?"

"Skating? I beg your pardon, Miss Dallas. Yes. I should not be surprised to find the lake frozen over any morning."

But he was glad when they were all gone at last.

"Why are you taking that upstairs, Harold?" my lady asked, as he came out of the library with a little iron-clamped box in his hand.

"I don't care to leave it downstairs to-night. There are several hundred pounds in it, rent I received to-day. A couple of houses in Rothlyn have been entered lately, and I would rather not run any risks."

Several hundred pounds! And she wanted just two hundred pounds. It was within her reach—actually brought under her hand!

In her boudoir, the Earl went over to her rosewood writing desk, drew out a drawer, placed the case he carried therein, closed and locked the drawer.

The key he dropped in his pocket. Across the top of the book she had taken up the Countess watched his every movement.

He sank wearily into his chair. His fine face was perplexed and moody.

"Tired, darling?"

She had laid down her book, crossed over to him, slipped her arm around his neck. The dear, loving voice, the clinging touch.

He brightened, smiled affectionately, and drew her lips down to his.

"Yes, and a small bit cranky," he confessed, laughing.

And then he went to bed and to sleep.

But with busily whirling brain the Countess of Silverdale lay and stared at the taper burning in a bowl of crimson glass on the console.

The bedroom was divided by an arch from the boudoir. Between the two hung heavy Oriental portières, which at night were pushed back on their brazen rod, so that the two made really one long room.

Directly opposite this arch an immense gold-framed mirror covered the wall from floor to ceiling.

How long Harold had slept he himself could not have told; but when he opened his eyes, he missed his wife from his side.

Ten minutes passed.

Still heavy with sleep, though his eyes were open, he lay motionless.

Was that a door jarring?

He moved a little.

Through the arch a soft light streamed. He could not see into the other apartment. Dully his gaze sought the great mirror. He stared therein stupidly, sleepily.

His wife, a wrapper flung over her nightgown, barefooted, a lamp in her hand, had come into the boudoir from the hall.

Some one had been taken ill, probably, and she had been called. But why was she standing so still, her head bent forward, as though listening?

There was no sound.

She laid her lamp down on a table, turned to her escritoire, applied something she held in her hand to the drawer.

A key—he heard it creak in the lock.

Between the dull glow of the taper on the very low console of the mirror and the brightness in the adjoining room, he could see quite well in the great glass.

She drew out the drawer, took therefrom his square cash-box, turned in it the tiny key he had neglected to remove, threw back the lid.

The mild surprise of the watcher became intensified into curiosity.

What in the wide world did Lillian want rummaging among his notes and bills at this hour of night? It must be long after midnight!

He sat bolt upright in bed. He saw her rise and with something in her hand, cross the room.

For an instant she passed out of his line of vision.

He was about to call, when she came back empty-handed.

As before, she stood stockstill a moment, as though listening.

Then softly and deliberately she turned the iron-clamped box upside down, strewing its contents in confusion on the floor.

Good Heavens! was she going mad? What else could such queer conduct mean?

The sweat started out on the Earl's brow.

There was such a catlike stealthiness of movement about her, such furtiveness of action, it mystified, terrified him.

Hush! he sank back.

She was coming in. With a last cautious look of secrecy around she had taken up her lamp.

Leaving the papers and money lying in the disorder in which she had strewn them, she came towards the half-curtained arch.

Impelled by excitement, the Earl rose to a sitting posture.

How quietly she moved! Her bare feet sunk in the soft carpet.

With one hand she pushed the portière still further aside. Holding the lamp in the other she came gliding in.

The light fell on her dainty face, on her loose, fur-bordered *negligé*, on the snowy laces

and embroideries of her *robe de nuit*, which puffed from the unbuttoned wrapper.

He did not for a second remove his eyes from the great mirror, though, now that she was in the room, he might have looked at her rather than her reflection.

But her actions had been so uncanny, so cunning, so inexplicable, he felt fairly frozen—incapable of as much as turning his head.

Two! It boomed solemnly from the clock above the stables.

Still holding the lamp, she advanced.

Immediately before her was the mirror, and in it—

Her heart ceased beating.

From the polished surface, directly at her looked the pallid face, the wild, wide eyes of the Earl of Silverdale!

CHAPTER XIX.

DETECTED!

She did not drop the lamp. Indeed, her slim fingers only closed more fiercely around it.

She had not been sufficiently cautious. She had supposed he would sleep soundly till morning, as he usually did.

And now he had seen all—all! She knew that by his dismayed and marvelling expression. How could she explain? what could she say?

She betrayed no emotion. She was too stunned for that. Still as if carved from stone she stood, scarcely breathing.

"Lillian!"

And even as he spoke a scheme, a device, flashed lightning-like to her brain. Steadily she moved forward—steadily and silently.

"Lillian!" he called, hoarsely, again.

But still she did not answer. With the same measured, noiseless step she passed just below the bed over to the mantle. There she deposited her lamp.

"Good Heaven!" the Earl groaned. "One or the other of us is mad!"

She turned slowly—came towards the bed.

Her face was set, her eyes open, vacant, unseeing.

And now she was beside him.

He put out his hand, touched her lightly.

Blankly and blindly she looked beyond him.

"Heaven!" he muttered. "She is asleep!"

She heard. Oh! her heart was beating fast enough now—fast and exultantly! That was her scheme. It had worked. That her plan. It had succeeded.

She had feigned somnambulism.

She began to remove her wrapper.

The Earl lay gently back on his pillow. He must not awaken her. He had heard of serious effects to a sleep-walker from being too suddenly aroused.

Ten minutes more, and she lay, the white lids drooped, the sweet breath coming full and even, wrapped in a fair and peaceful slumber.

Little Lillian—his poor, dear, little Lillian!

And what wild, horrible doubts about her had been unnerving, haunting him!

It was foolish of him to have told her there were burglars in Rothlyn. The idea had doubtless frightened her. She had slept awhile, dreamed of intruders, and had risen in her sleep to act their part.

The winter dawn was grey and dreary in the east when he rose, dressed quietly, went into the boudoir, collected his scattered papers, found his memorandum, counted his money.

The total was incorrect. He referred to his list of receipts—counted again. Two hundred pounds were missing.

She had crossed the room, he remembered now, with something in her hand.

Where had she secreted it?

He was about to make search for it when a low knock came to the door.

He instantly opened it. The servant looked rather astonished at seeing his master up and dressed so early.

"Please, your lordship, we found the library window, shutters and all, wide open this morning. And Thomas says he fastened

every one last night. We are afraid it maybe thieves got in, seeing as they are in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, nonsense!" ejaculated the Earl, abruptly. "Don't be alarmed at your shadow. Some one doubtless opened the casement after Thomas closed it, that is all. Some one in the house."

But as he spoke he comprehended the circumstance which had scared the servants.

In her excited and irresponsible condition, Lillian had gone down and opened the window, full of some vague consciousness that thus it was burglars entered. Then she had returned and emptied his cash-box on the floor, and then had gone back to bed and fallen asleep sweetly as a child.

Somnambulists perpetrated fantastic tricks occasionally. Half a-dozen he had heard came into his head.

But that two hundred pounds! Where had she put it? They would probably discover by chance. Of course she could not remember.

"Harold!"

"Yes, love."

She was up and dressed, coming through the parted portières.

"How early we both are up! I was restless and could sleep no longer. Yet I feel so tired, too."

She passed her hand over her eyes. She was looking wan and weary. She shivered in her warm wrapper of white merino and swansdown.

"Shall I tell you why, Lillian?" he asked, tenderly.

"Why?"

And she looked up at him with the innocent questioning of a baby.

"You feel exhausted because—don't be frightened, dear—because, instead of resting all these hours, you've been roaming over the house."

"I? Harold?"

Her amazement was boundless.

"Yes. You walked in your sleep last night."

"Oh, Harold!"

"You did, dear. When you returned to bed I spoke to you, touched you, but you only looked straight ahead. Your face was fixed, your eyes were unseeing."

"Oh, Harold!" she gasped again.

He stooped and kissed her.

"There is nothing to look so frightened about, little one," he said, kindly.

And he made up his mind he would say no word to her about the missing two hundred pounds. It would only distress, annoy her. He would not cause her mortification for thrice the sum.

"And now we will go down for a cup of coffee. I have to ride into Rothlyn early."

She understood his silence.

How gentle and generous and noble he was! how worthy of the best woman God ever made! And she was his companion. He who was all that was high-minded, high-hearted, honourable—he under the ancestral roof which sheltered his young daughter, lived with her, a woman he had never wedded, and—oh, the strange, shameful deception of it all—he knew it not!

CHAPTER XX.

FRIDAY!

The short winter afternoon was almost gone. In the west a few bars of orange and dull-red streaked the chill, grey sky.

Seated in her favourite sleepy-hollow chair by her boudoir fire, the Countess of Silverdale bound a handkerchief around her brows, took up her vinaigrette, rang the bell by the mantle and then sank back in her chair, her countenance assuming an expression of physical distress.

"Jane!"

"Yes, my lady."

"If anyone asks for me, say I am feeling too ill to see them—that I have a wretched headache. I make no exceptions. I cannot

possibly be present at dinner this evening unless I can secure a few hours rest now."

"Yes, your ladyship."

And Jane left her.

Hardly was she gone when the Countess leaped up, tore the handkerchief from her forehead, flung aside her vinaigrette and passed into the next room, whence she emerged a few minutes later, clad in dark, tight-fitting walking costume from top to toe.

She counted over the roll of notes she held, then secreted them in the breast-pocket of her coat.

She went to the window.

Was it dark enough?

Yes, she might risk it now.

He had not said the hour he would be there, but most likely about the same time as before. He would be "skulking around," as he had said himself.

She was all impatience to be off. If it were only over!

The possession of the money, when she recalled how she had secured some of it, seemed actually to irritate, gall her.

She wanted to get rid of it—to have the distasteful, necessary meeting a thing of the past. This was the last time, please goodness, she would ever see his hateful face!

Egypt, he had said. Egypt was a long way off!

Yes, the last glimmer of daylight was gone. No one would see her now; or, seeing, they would not recognize her.

She went out on the small, side balcony, as she had gone the night she ran down to see the baby at the Lodge. But now, instead of hurrying down the main avenue, she made a detour and came out almost at the spot where she before had met him.

There he was, walking up and down under a leafless tree, a pipe—her pretty nose curled at the scent of the vile tobacco—a pipe in his mouth, his cap drawn low, his hands in his pockets.

Light as was her footfall, it sounded distinct on the frozen snow.

He wheeled round. She went directly up to him.

"Here!"

She had thrust her gloved hand in her bosom, and was holding him out the package. He took it with a chuckle.

"All right, I suppose?" fingering it.

She sighed no reply.

"Well, you've stuck to your word, my lady," and now he touched his cap. "I'll stick to mine."

If he only would! Surely the worst was over now. She had no more to fear.

They turned immediately in different directions.

As she emerged on the broad, main avenue, she almost ran into Sir Geoffrey Damyn.

"I beg your pardon!"

He recognized her voice, and quickly lifted his hat.

"Alone, Lady Silverdale?" He gave a rapid glance around for a possible escort. "Are you not afraid to be out when it is so dark and late?"

She accepted his proffered arm.

"I?" laughing. "Oh, no! I am never afraid!"

There was something more than merry bravado in the musical voice. There was defiance.

At the Castle steps she paused, and shook her head.

"Go in," she said; "and don't mention our meeting."

Puzzled, but obedient, he entered the hall.

Standing at the window above, through the oppressively quiet, extremely clear night air, the Earl heard the injunction, "Don't mention our meeting!"

To whom had she said that? It certainly was Lillian's voice. Why had she said it?

And just then she burst in through the long, French window.

The room was brightly lighted. She took

one backward step, then came in, closing the casement.

Her husband confronted her!

"Where have you been, Lillian?" demanded the Earl, rather sternly.

A certain petulance swept over her.

This was the second time lately he had met her with the same question.

"For a walk," coldly.

"With whom?"

"Alone."

There was gravity, if not sternness, in his regard.

"Jane told me you were quite ill with the headache, and must not be disturbed."

She was angry at herself for having resented his first inquiry. She might have remembered he never was unjust.

She was worn out from the exciting events of the previous night—from her dread all day of her appointed interview.

So, feeling driven and confused, she faced him, and said the very last thing she felt she should say,—

"Then why did you intrude?"

"Intrude, Lillian?"

She was getting deeper in the mire. Why was she so "contrary?" Never had she loved him more dearly.

"Yes."

Just the one icy word.

He drew himself to his full height.

"I came in sympathy, Lillian," with sad dignity. "You were not here. I supposed you had gone out to try if the air would serve your head. I was listening for you at the window, when I heard you speak to—whom?"

She had quite forgotten her words. Her only reason for cautioning silence had been that her guests might doubt her headache, after learning she had been out.

So she answered, frankly enough,—

"Sir Geoffrey Damyn."

His eyes flashed, but he said no word.

Ah, Sir Geoffrey Damyn! And he was not to mention their meeting!

He bowed gravely.

"I shall leave you to dress," he said.

He had reached the door.

She ran after him.

"Harold," she cried, impulsively, "you are not angry with me?"

Very lightly his "lips of bearded bloom" brushed those she coaxingly lifted.

"Of course not."

But the seed of suspicion was sown!

CHAPTER XXI.

"By Jupiter!" muttered Geoffrey Damyn. He had seen many fair women in his day, this *blond* young man, but never one as imperially beautiful as the girl who came down the great black staircase of Castle Silverdale the night of the Braceborough ball.

Quite a little crowd had assembled. They would leave together from here.

The huge hall was brilliantly lighted. The sea-coal fire was big enough and hot enough to roast an ox.

The group, in festal attire, gave to the cathedral-like place a warmth, a glow, a life which was altogether charming.

Like loyal guards awaiting their queen, seemed the two mailed figures of bronze which at either side of the base of the grand stairway, down which Lady Iva came, held aloft cups of crimson flame.

Her first ball! So she was all in white—the slightest, cloudiest of tulle. The fair arms and bosom were bare, but long gloves wrinkled over the elbows of the former—some filmy stuff modestly veiled, while it only half hid the latter.

A spray of ivy leaves partly circled "the massive cable of twisted gold" which crowned her pretty, high-held head. Round her throat was a string of pearls which had been her mother's. Jewels that were fit for a princess

royal—purely luminous as prisoned moon-light.

And the face, with all a girl's delight in her first ball, shyness, because of her first full dress, looking gladly and blushing from it—how lovely it was! how winsome!—perhaps more than either, how lovable!

The delicate features, the cheeks of soft rose-velvet, the brilliant, dark-lash, violet-black eyes, the proud, smiling lips, the gleaming teeth, the pretty serene, yet girlish air.

No wonder Geoffrey Damyn said, "By Jupiter!" under his breath; no wonder Lancelot Carlyn looked at her with a world of adoration in his bold brown eyes; or that the Earl of Silverdale realized, as he had never quite done before, what a handsome daughter he possessed.

"Behold the bells of the ball!" cried Colonel Harrington, with an elaborate bow.

A snowy-moustache, scarlet-coated, gold-laced old warrior, he happened at present to be stationed at Rothlyn to the great delight of his sister, Mrs. Trendworth.

"Ah, poor me!" sighed that lady, who, in fawn brocade and rubies, looked ten years younger than the age which she could honestly claim. "Poor me! I shall be bestirred."

For she it was who had promptly agreed to chaperone the Earl's daughter.

"She will not leave them heart-whole long," quoted Lord Rossiter, smilingly.

"Ah, who has she left heart-whole now?" queried Jimmie Talbot, tragically.

She stood blushing and laughing while the hurricans of raillery blew merrily around her.

"Not you, Jimmie, I know."

"Faith it's a true word you speak!" acknowledged Jimmie.

The tone, the words were those of an Irish visitor at the Trendworths, a witty and gallant old gentleman.

When the laughter was over, they donned wraps and prepared to leave.

Languid, cynical, handsome, Sir Geoffrey Damyn rose, looked in Iva's direction.

But young Carlyn was wiser. His eyes sent a swift petition to Mrs. Trendworth.

"The Colonel, Iva and I will drive together," called her jolly voice. "We have room for just one more. Mr. Carlyn, I choose you."

She had liked him since he was a boy in knickerbockers. He was always so brave, so chivalrous, so full of rattling good spirits which were not a form of dare-devillism.

She felt fully repaid by the smile of gratitude he flashed her.

Geoffrey Damyn silently fell back.

"Good-bye, little mamma!"

And Iva bent to give her a loving kiss.

"Enjoy yourself, dear."

"I couldn't help it—not if I wanted to," she laughed. "How I wish you were coming!"

Then the doors clanked open, and with jest and laughter they passed out into the waiting carriages, and were driven away.

A most aristocratic club, this Braceborough. An invitation to its annual ball argued the recipient socially irreproachable. And for the present occasion, the members having the affair in charge seemed to have surpassed themselves.

Everywhere were holly and mistletoe—everywhere flags and flowers and lights.

The cream of the county gathered there. Officers from Rothlyn lent colour to the scene. A famous London editor, a French dramatist, an American senator, brought their individual prestige to distinguish the event.

And as Colonel Harrington had predicted, the beauty and belle of the night, the most admired, surrounded, sought, was the lovely young daughter of the Earl of Silverdale.

Carlyn was in Paradise. She had given him the first dance, a smile and a rose.

But the second and fifth she danced with Geoffrey Damyn. And, unless when he waltzed with her, that gentleman took no part in the festivity.

He leaned against one of the entrance pillars, and watched her while she floated through the lancers with Jimmie Talbot.

What a picture she was, to be sure! how stately for all her lissome girlishness! And how well—how exceedingly well—she would look at his—Sir Geoffrey Damyn's—table!

That was the conjecture which absorbed him, which made him stand so long watching her through his half-shut eyes.

Love her?

Something between a moan and a sigh escaped him.

Not as he had loved Marguerite in that bright, brief, fairy summer—not like that. But he must not let that wretched affair spoil his whole life. He must take possession of the estates which had accrued to him with his title, do his duty to his tenants, instal a wife at picturesque old Sannyside.

And where could he find one as noble and as fair as Lady Iva Silverdale?

But could she care at all for him?

Ah, that was uncertain!

Living in the same house with her, as he had been for the last couple of weeks, he had found it simply impossible to break down the barriers of mere bright and barren acquaintanceship.

"It is deucedly hard," the young Baronet decided, "that I should be compelled to attempt my wooing under eyes which are the counterpart of others I have loved. Confound it all! I remember that Marguerite is dead. I come into a room and she—or one sufficiently like her to be her other self—sits before me. And with the shock—for it is always a shock—I fancy she is not dead and buried after all. It's a confoundingly embarrassing position for a fellow to find himself in! Embarrassing? Worse than that. It is most infernally uncomfortable!"

The hours took wings and vanished—literally danced away.

Vainly had Carlyn pleaded for another dance.

"You are to have the last, you know," Iva said.

"Yes; but that will only make two. You have given Damyn as many as that."

"Well," quietly, "why should I not?"

A poser that!

He was glad no answer was necessary, for just then her partner claimed her.

The night was nearly over, the crowd already thinning.

Soon would the Braceborough ball, with its music, its fleeting feet, its heart burnings and its triumphs, be but a brilliant memory.

Soft and slow uprose, untwelled and sank to softly rise again, the music of the last waltz.

"Now!" Lance Carlyn said.

The moment of his bliss had come.

Up and down, now here, then there, in perfect time perfect tune they swayed and drifted.

"Iva!"

His dark head was bowed till his lips almost touched her hair.

He felt her start. But she did not speak.

He was a bold wooer. He was not easily dismayed.

He spoke again.

"Iva, love!"

"Mr. Carlyn!"

Low and sweet the music pulsed.

"Why should I not say it?" he murmured, fervently. "You are my love—first, last, for ever! Nothing on earth can alter that—nothing in Heaven!"

Oh, the lilting, dreamful music! The fierce tenderness of his words, their young passion thrilled her.

The pale-rose on her cheek deepened to carnation. But her lips faltered.

"I'm not worthy of you, Iva," as they circled smoothly on. "But what fellow is? And I'm not going to lose the white rose above my head because it is too exquisite for me. Have I any chance, sweetheart—any chance at all?"

She did love him—how deeply her own child-heart knew not yet. She was so young, and he might not care for her so much if she were to let him know.

The waltz was almost done. The last bars quivered softly through the room. And she did not want to be engaged to anyone just yet. But she must not answer no!

She lifted to his her flower-sweet face. Her eyes were laughing, but tender, too.

"Perhaps a very tiny little chance!" she said, in a voice of love and coquetry and mischief blended.

His brown eyes kindled.

"It is worth the wide world to me!" he whispered.

The melody died away.

They stood still.

"Harry, Iva!" cried Mrs. Trendworth, hastening up. "The carriage is waiting. Why, you look as fresh as when we came! Gracious, what pink cheeks! Lance, you audacious boy, whatever have you been saying to her?"

The audacious boy bowed low.

"I've been telling her," he responded, gravely, "that if there is anything which makes the thought of the coming Christmas dear to my heart—if there is anything which makes life something greater and higher than mere existence—if there is anything the blessed season holds for me delightful beyond expression—it is the prospect of unlimited roast turkey and plum-pudding!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"WHAT a night!" said Iva.

She was leaning forward, looking out of the carriage window, as the vehicle rolled on toward the Castle over the frozen roads.

And truly the sleeping world looked divine this "hour before the dawn."

For on either side spread the fields of snow, sparkling like crystal in the moonlight. And the purple air was rarefied, almost sharp, but delicious as wine, to strong, young lungs.

Here and there outgleamed a dim and lonely light in houses where children might awaken or a watcher kept vigil.

"It is heavenly!" Carlyn assented.

For he was returning with them. Mrs. Trendworth would leave him at his place on her way home.

"Like a night in America, where snow is no comparative novelty, I should fancy," declared Mrs. Trendworth. "I know it makes me think of Lowell's lines.

"What are they?" asked her brother, who, old as he was, had literary aspirations and sympathies.

"Listen!" and she quoted them.

"God makes each night all white an' still

For as ye can look or listen;

Moonshine an' snow on field an' hill,

All silence an' all glisten."

"Thank you!" Lance said, courteously, as she concluded. "I am afraid it isn't night at all now, though; it is morning. Look there!"

And sure enough, away to the east was a faint, shimmering greenness.

Suddenly the carriage stopped. What could be the cause?

They were almost at the southern lodge. Dimly ahead they could see the huge gates.

The driver clambered down.

"Is the man drunk?" questioned the colonel, who, like most old war-horses, was a trifle irascible in the early morning.

The man appeared at the carriage door.

Lance Carlyn pushed down the window.

"Well?"

"Please, sir there's something in the road here, just at the entrance to the demesne."

Lance laughed at the delay.

Why should he not? Had she not said there was hope? A very little tiny bit, to be sure; but was not half a loaf better than no bread?

"What, Jemmy—a snake?"

"No, sir!" indignantly. "A woman!"

A woman!

They looked at each other in dismay. There was a startled silence.

"I'll get out and see. Don't stir, Harrington," said Lance, in a voice of authority.

Iva did not move or speak.

He opened the door, jumped out, walked on ahead with Jemmy.

In an instant he was back.

"Don't be alarmed, but a woman is lying almost perished, a little way ahead—directly before the gates, which are being opened. Jemmy shall drive you through. Colonel, I'm afraid I shall have to ask your assistance.

"Certainly," he assented, rising and getting out.

In the semi-darkness Mrs. Trendworth laid her hand on Iva's. It was trembling.

"Why, dear child, how nervous you are!"

The sweet voice which replied from the shadow had a timid quiver,—

"I don't know why, but I am—somehow—afraid."

Jemmy remounted the box.

They drove on a little further, then turned to the left—rumbled under the enormous iron gates leading to Silverdale Castle.

Just within, directly before the lodge, the vehicle paused.

The lodge door stood ajar; from its aperture streamed light.

Jemmy laboriously reached earth again and presented himself at the coach casement.

"They've taken the poor creature into Mrs. Morris', ma'am," he said, in explanation.

Iva rose.

"Where are you going, dear?"

But the girl disregarded her chaperone's outstretched hand.

"Granny is old and stupid," she said. "I am going in. I may be of some use. Perhaps the woman is dying. I can't keep still!"

"The impulsive child!" thought Mrs. Trendworth.

But she followed her just the same.

They shivered and drew their fur wraps more closely around them as through the biting air they passed up the path to the cottage.

They entered without knocking.

"This way," directed Iva.

Into the parlour on the left they went.

The small room was dimly lit by a single dip candle.

On a rep sofa in the corner lay a dark and quiet figure.

Near it stood Lance Carlyn and the colonel.

Granny Morris, suddenly aroused and still fumbling with her cap-strings, was just coming in.

"What is it?" she questioned.

"A poor creature half frozen at your door, granny," Lance explained. "We are on our way home from the ball. Mrs. Trendworth's coachman discovered her."

"Have you brandy?" asked the colonel.

She nodded.

"Bring it—and be quick, please!" he said.

He uncorked the flask presented.

"Lift her head, Carlyn."

And when the younger man had done so, he pressed the clenched teeth apart and poured a goodly dose down.

She moved, lifted her hand to her face—with an effort sat erect.

And now they saw she was an old woman, for her thick hair was silvery. She was clad in a plain stuff dress, black bonnet and shawl.

When the latter slipped from her shoulders, they noticed she was hunchbacked.

The face below the smoothly-banded hair was delicately-featured, dark-skinned, thin and worn. Her eyes were covered by big blue goggles. The nervous little hands were attenuated.

(To be continued.)

It is the bounty of nature that we live, but of philosophy that we live well; which is, in truth, a greater benefit than life itself.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

—10:—

CHAPTER XLIX.

THERE was great dismay in the hearts of the four conspirators when they realised the fact that their master was dangerously ill, and that if no measures were adopted for his recovery he would have to answer for his outrageous actions in another world, whilst those who had aided and abetted him would be called to account in this.

Mrs. de Rippington went about the house sighing heavily, and racking her brains to see how she could best recompense herself for a prompt dismissal, which was sure to be her fate.

During the absence of Mrs. Seddon she kept the key of the store-room, and it struck her very forcibly that if she were suddenly turned out from this comfortable shelter she would be robbed of the food and maintenance which she had a right to expect.

Her conscience, as we have hinted before, was a very peculiar one, which never influenced her own actions, but only induced her to keep a check on the doings of others. She would have trembled with virtuous indignation if anyone had accused her of stealing, and yet if search had been made in her boxes, down at the bottom of most of them tea, sugar, and other groceries would have been found secreted.

This she called providing for the future at Sir Eric's expense—that future which he had endangered by his own strange proceedings. She deceived herself with the idea that this was simple justice, but if she were found out, nothing would have saved her from looking and feeling like a thief.

Whistler did nothing to compromise himself, but he had been well paid for his services, and it mortified him greatly to think they would come to an end with his master.

If Sir Eric died, he was determined to disappear, as brazening it out was not likely to answer.

He had lined his purse remarkably well, and he would strike out in a new sphere. Nobody would be able to say anything worse of him than that he had carried out his master's orders, but a few misguided people might be foolish enough to think that he ought to have thrown up his situation rather than obey them. These were inconveniently virtuous people, whose prejudices must be considered. Therefore, he intended to slip off, but still it would be a great disaster to be interrupted in the midst of his well-paid labours by his master's inconsiderate decease.

James and Sarah saw their chances of illing, respectively, Markham and Mrs. Seddon's posts fading from them; and, in fact, had more than a faint suspicion that they would be asked to leave The Towers at the shortest notice.

It was a gloomy time for them all, and a season of anxious suspense. During those two long days Sir Eric gradually grew worse, though he insisted upon getting up.

James had to assist Whistler to dress him, and when the tedious process was over, he dropped down upon the sofa so exhausted that they had to give him a stimulant in order to revive him.

The pain in his leg was intense, but he would not give in, and his brain seemed half-bewildered.

With a shaky hand he wrote an extraordinary note to his ward, telling her to choose between instant marriage with himself—and starvation!

Whistler took in the note, and for once felt so ashamed of himself that he dared not meet Miss Farquhar's indignant glance.

Brenda read it through, her pretty lips curling with utmost scorn, though her cheeks turned a shade whiter.

She had had very little food the day before, and no breakfast that morning—and to be without food was unpleasant, to say the least.

However, she wrote on a scrap of paper: "Starvation would be infinitely preferable!" and gave it to the valet, without deigning to look at him.

He carried the fragment back to his master, who cried with an oath as he read it,—

"She shall have it! By George, I'll master her!"

Then, for fear of being hoodwinked by those about him, he sent for Mrs. de Rippington, James and Sarah, and made them all, together with Whistler, take a solemn oath that no food should be given to Miss Farquhar during the remainder of the day.

The widow thought it her duty to ask what his motive was, to which Sir Eric answered shortly, "To bring her to a better frame of mind!"

This apparently quieted her conscience, for she made no further demur except by heaving a profound sigh, whilst Sarah broke out with an indignant remonstrance, but not till she had reached the other side of the door.

"Don't be a fool!" said James, roughly, for he meant to exact heavy payment for such a trial to his conscience. "It's only for a day, and think how many poor beggars go without a mouthful from sunrise to sundown!"

"Yes; but a lady ain't accustomed to it, and it goes against me, it do," she replied, with a shake of her head! "and what cook will say, I'm afraid to think!"

"Benson must know nothing about it," said Mrs. de Rippington, hastily. "She must prepare the meals as usual, and you must dispose of them."

James grinned with positive enjoyment of the project; but his face expressed the reverse of pleasure, when, on going into the kitchen, he saw a young woman, respectably dressed in a black-and-white tweed gown, and recognised Mary, once Miss Farquhar's maid.

"Well, James, you needn't look as if you had seen a ghost," she said, with a laugh. "I can't afford to be idle any longer, so I've come to ask Miss Farquhar for a character."

"Miss Farquhar's—not—here," he stammered, his usual audacity forsaking him.

"Don't talk nonsense to me; but just run into the drawing-room, and ask her if she'll be good enough to see me."

"It's no mortal use my going to the drawing-room, for she ain't there. She's been at Brighton for the last weeks," he rejoined, doggedly.

"You don't say so!" in a tone of surprise. "Surely Sir Eric didn't send her off alone?"

"No; the old lady took care of her."

"Indeed! I shouldn't have thought it. Perhaps you will give me the address?"

"I haven't got it, but I can get it for you. Where are you hanging out?"

"At 'The Fox and Grapes,' but I'm not in such a desperate hurry. Mrs. Benson has kindly asked me to stay to dinner," inwardly much amused to think how this hospitable offer would annoy him.

Mary had been at Singleton Hall with Lady Manville, who had grown very uneasy at Brenda's silence.

Her conscience rather reproached her for her desertion of her post, and when Mary came to tell her of her own and George's abrupt dismissal, and her young mistress's most unpleasant position, she wrote an indignant letter to Sir Eric, which, it is needless to say, was left unanswered.

Now, unable to stand the uncertainty any longer, at her daughter's advice she sent Mary to reconnoitre.

The faithful maid was only too willing to do all she could, and when she met Mrs. Wyndham at the village inn, and heard that her mistress was absolutely a prisoner in her own home, her heart nearly burst with indignation.

She wanted to go straight off to the police, but Mrs. Wyndham was anxious to avoid a scandal, if possible, and also terribly afraid that the Baronet might be driven to still worse extremes by such a desperate measure.

"Sir Eric won't stick at nothing," said Mary, her eyes blazing. "I shouldn't wonder

if the poor young lady didn't get enough to eat. Did you notice if she was thin, mum?"

"The light was so bad, and I only had a minute, but I fancied that she looked ill."

"Depend upon it he's starving her, and that Sarah won't care a straw. I must take her something, or it will turn my brain to think of her," the tears pouring down her cheeks.

"That you shall, my good girl," said Mrs. Wyndham, heartily, "I'll get our landlady to have some pates made. Your only chance will be to throw them in at her window."

"I'll manage it somehow," said Mary, resolutely.

When she first reached The Towers she had a black bag on her arm, which she hid in a holly bush before going into the house.

Before dinner, she noticed that the cook retired into the scullery for some time; and peeping through a crack in the door, which Mrs. Benson had left ajar, she saw two luncheon trays being prepared, for which James and Sarah seemed to be waiting.

She naturally came to the conclusion that she had done Sir Eric injustice, but her views changed when, a few minutes later, she caught sight of James and Sarah in the act of demolishing a plate of chicken mayonnaise, whilst a dish of stewed plums, covered with cream, stood close by ready to be devoured.

"Oh, the fiends!" she thought, clenching her fist in a burning rage.

She would have liked to denounce them on the spot, but Mrs. Wyndham had specially enjoined her to seem as if she noticed nothing, so she went back to her own dinner in too fierce a rage to have much appetite.

Neither the housemaid nor the footman could look her in the face; but Mr. Whistler, who presided at the head of the table, thought it well to be very civil, and promised to do his best with his master about a character for her, in the absence of Miss Farquhar.

He was exceedingly anxious to get her off the premises, and mentally anathematized the cook for asking her to stay.

Just as he was going away, having scrambled over his dinner in great haste, he looked out of the window, and remarked that it was going to be a wet afternoon.

Mary took the hint, and said she must soon be starting homewards. She tied her bonnet strings in an elaborate bow, and fumbled with the hooks of her mantle, till the other servants had left the kitchen, and she was alone with Mrs. Benson. Then she bade her good bye, and added carelessly,—

"I suppose I might gather some of the white roses, if there are any left. I should like to have a bunch for the sake of old times."

"Take as many as you like. There's nobody to care for them now. I'm sure I'm thankful to have had such a nice chat. This is the dullest house I ever was in."

"It used to be the merriest in the county."

"But the master's illness has changed everything, you see," said the cook, hastily. "Good bye to you, and a pleasant walk. There'll be no rain to speak of."

It is very difficult to dawdle when you are in a violent hurry, and so Mary found it, as, with her bag on her arm, she strolled leisurely through the gardens, as if with no special object in view. There was a great change in their aspect since she had last seen them, when such a thing as a weed in one of the ornamental beds was never to be discovered. Now, in spite of her preoccupation, she noticed an impudent bit of chickweed next door to a fine geranium, and actually one or two pieces of groundsel amongst the calceolarias!

Then she turned the corner of the house, and her heart beat fast as she looked up at her young mistress's window. It was broad daylight, when she could be seen from one end of the terrace to the other, so that she had to be as quick as possible in case of being disturbed. She opened her bag, and without waiting for any sign of Miss Farquhar's presence, threw the pates up, one after the other, as fast as she could. They were made of

delicate pastry filled with minced veal. Some went short of the mark and tumbled in fragments on the gravel, others dropped inside the room, where no doubt they made the same disreputable mess on the carpet.

Presently a weary, white face appeared, and Mary could scarcely keep back the loving cry which sprang to her lips as she saw her beloved mistress above her head, but quite out of reach. To Brenda the sight of her maid's honest face was like the first glimpse of water in a desert. She leant out with extended arms; but remembering that every word would be heard, made signs to her to go to the other window round the corner.

Mary stooped to pick up the crumbs off the gravel, but finding that they would take too long, was obliged to leave them where they were, to tell their tale to the first comer. Then she hurried back to the window of the bedroom.

"Keep up your heart, ma'am," she almost whispered, whilst tears of infinite pity ran down her cheeks. "You shall be saved, and all these rascals punished to-night, or to-morrow."

"Oh, Mary! I think I shall die soon, and I shan't be sorry," in a voice husky with weakness.

"Now don't—don't give up, there's a dear. They'll all be here soon, and him who has brought you to this shall shrink in his shoes. Mrs. Wyndham and me is close by—on purpose—"

"Hush!" whispered Brenda, not a moment too soon, as James Smith came across the lawn with a pair of garden-scissors in his hand.

"Hulloa, who's there? You've no business here, mum; so I must trouble you to walk off!"

"I like your impudence!" exclaimed Mary, wrathfully, glad to vent her indignation on somebody at last. "I've been given permission to pick these roses, and these roses I am going to pick, whether you like it or not;" and she gathered a few faded blossoms which grew against the wall.

"They are all dead; but look sharp. I can't stand here all day!" sulkily.

"I can do without you; so don't trouble yourself!" with affected politeness.

"It's as much as my place is worth to let a stranger into these here grounds."

"Good gracious! boy, I'm no stranger. I'm Miss Farquhar's maid that was, and I wanted to have a chat with old friends."

"Well, the old friends ain't out here!" gruffly.

"No; but the roses are. One would think you had a madhouse here to see how it's guarded!" and she walked off without daring to give another glance at the window.

CHAPTER

That was a terrible day for the people at The Towers, for Sir Eric grew rapidly worse. Whistler did not dare to leave him except for those few minutes which he spared for his dinner, and then Mrs. de Rippington was left on guard.

He gave the most contradictory orders, and broke out into the most violent bursts of passion at the merest trifle.

He sent for his ward to come to him, longing to pour out some of the bitterness of his heart on her poor young head. But she resolutely refused to go near him, and though he told his servants to bring her to him they could do no more but deliver the message, as they would have had to use physical force to prevail, and they did not dare to touch her.

The four confederates grew more and more uneasy as the day went on, for they could see that such a state of things could not last much longer.

The day of reckoning was at hand, and they had not received the large sums with which their master had bribed them to their shameful obedience.

Mrs. de Rippington threw out a hint about the miseries of a poverty-stricken existence; but Sir Eric, in answer, only growled out something more insulting than usual.

Whistler hoped that his services would be remembered, as he threw into the fire a letter directed to Miss Farquhar, in Miss Allingham's handwriting.

"Remembered—yes?" with a mocking smile. "You are a lucky dog, for if I forget you, somebody else will be sure to pay you for them."

"I don't want to be remembered by anyone but my own master."

"Oh, Miss Farquhar will remember you—never fear. You can be indicted for aiding and abetting a conspiracy."

"You are the last person to remind me of that, sir!"

"Am I?" leaning his chin on his hand. "Does she look ill, Whistler? Can she get across the room without stumbling? Any sign of giving in?"

"Miss Farquhar's face is as white as my collar, but she has a wonderful spirit. It's my belief she'll die rather than give in. I wouldn't go on with it any longer if I was you, sir?"

Sir Eric burst out into a storm of oaths and curses which did not ruffle his valet's composure in the least, only he watched his master with an anxious eye, fearing lest he were really going mad.

These fears increased as the dusk deepened, and the Baronet lay on the sofa glaring into a dark corner, and muttering to himself.

Sarah was afraid to go near him, and James decidedly preferred the other side of the door, but Whistler positively refused to be left alone with him, so Mrs. de Rippington was forced to keep him company in the unpleasant watch. Disagreeable as that was, she preferred it to going into the next room, and meeting the grave, reproachful eyes of the girl whom she had helped to ill-treat.

As soon as it was growing dark, Sir Eric had the room lighted up by numerous lamps and candles, but they could see that his dark mood was coming on him.

It was terrible to watch him with the agony of fear growing on him, as he shivered from head to foot, and shook the heavy sofa which supported him, his handsome face already haggard with pain, now still more ghastly with a new terror.

"He's mad! he's mad!" murmured the widow, as she clasped her fingers tightly together to control an impulse which was growing stronger every moment to run out of the room.

She was a woman with a curious mind, and as she listened to the Baronet's fierce curses hurled at an invisible "thing," it seemed to her as if she could see into the darkest depths of his heart; it was as if all the evil of his nature were laid bare before her. She could see the secret sin lying at the bottom, with all the other sins which had grown out of it—the selfishness, the recklessness, the faithlessness, the contempt of honour, the cruel disregard of others' pain, the fierce, wild jealousy—clinging like fungi to a rotten stem. She could see the conscience, long dormant, waking up to sudden vitality to be the torture and the torment of its master; and her own conscience was stung into life at the same time, and she saw her own mean, cringing, shuffling sort of existence in its true light.

"I can't stay here!" she gasped. "I believe the devil's let loose!"

"You can't leave me," said Whistler, hoarsely, "devil or no devil! I wouldn't answer for the consequences. Look at him now!"

As he spoke, the unhappy man tried to rise, but failed, and clutched the back of the sofa in impotent fear.

"You've come too soon! you've come too soon!" he cried. "I'm not ready yet! Oh! curse you, you fiend! Let me alone! I'll give it him back, I tell you! Will that satisfy you? I'll give it him back!—when I'm dead!"

There was a loud knocking outside, which made Mrs. de Rippington start from her seat.

"It's Miss Farquhar!" she cried, in a hoarse whisper. "I believe she's gone off her head!" and she rushed from the room, calling to Sarah and James to come and help.

Sarah was close by, but the footman was just making his way across the hall to the front door. Mrs. de Rippington's cry distracted his attention, and, thinking something serious had happened, he sprang up the stairs.

"It's Miss Farquhar! Miss Farquhar!" she gasped. "I don't know what's happening, but I must go and see!"

With shaking fingers she put the key into the lock, and opened the door.

Brenda was sitting by the window, her head propped against the pretty blue curtain, her long lashes resting on the deathly whiteness of her cheeks. She looked so still, and so motionless, that a pang of fear shot through the widow's heart. Her utter quietness stood out in vivid contrast with her guardian's restlessness, and struck Mrs. de Rippington as unnatural and ominous. She stood still, and looked at the slight young figure with startled eyes.

"What do you want?" asked Brenda, wearily. "Have you come to mock me?"

"I—I thought you wanted something," stammered the widow in her surprise.

"I want many things—but you won't bring them, so I only ask to be left alone!"

"I've no wish to stay. There's that knocking again! Bless me, it's the front door," hurrying out of the room as quickly as she came in.

Brenda leant her head wearily against the curtain, feeling as if she had come to the end of her endurance.

It was cheering to know at last that her friends had not forgotten her; but it seemed to her as if the knowledge had come too late. She would be out of all her misery if she died, and death she thought was hovering over her with his sable wings. And yet a strange instinct kept her from asking for it. Cyril was gone before; why did she hesitate to follow? There could be nothing to keep her on earth—nothing, absolutely nothing!

Meanwhile, Mrs. de Rippington stood outside the door with the key in her hand watching James—stricken dumb with astonishment.

The front door, which had been so carefully barred and bolted, was thrown wide open, and in came a fair-haired young man leading in a tall, aristocratic-looking lady, with a slight figure and a pale, refined face. They were followed by a military-looking man, with dark hair and grey moustaches. Behind them were two other people, probably a maid and a valet, who were busying themselves about some luggage.

Had James gone raving mad? What was he thinking of? Where was Whistler? What was everybody thinking of?

Before she could enter the Blue Room and give the alarm, the fair-haired stranger came quickly up the stairs as if the place belonged to him, and passed her by with eager steps. The next minute his hand was on the handle of Miss Farquhar's door, which he shook as if he would shake it down when he found that it was locked. Then he turned his stern blue eyes upon the key in the widow's hand, and said, imperiously,—

"Open that door at once! What right had you or anyone else to lock it?"

"The young lady's away from home—the room's empty," she said, hurriedly, though completely overmastered by his air of authority.

"Open that door!" his eyes blazing, his teeth set.

Mrs. de Rippington knew instinctively that it would be no use to resist, and she handed him the key which she had kept so long.

His hand shook with eagerness, but the key turned easily, and opening the door he went in and closed it behind him.

"Bren, my poor darling, where are you?"

he said, hoarsely, looking round the dusky room with eager eyes, and fearing he scarcely knew what.

At the sound of his voice there was a movement by the window. Brenda staggered to her feet, and put her hand to her forehead, half-thinking she was dreaming.

"Cyril! Cyril!" she cried, breathlessly, and the next moment she was clasped in his arms, and felt his passionate kisses on her lips. Yes, he whom she had mourned as dead was there in all the beauty, though not the strength of his manhood.

He held her to his heart in one long, rapturous embrace, and they were never to part again, and stroked the bonnie brown hair with loving touch, and murmured fondest words of love over her head. Then he drew her to the window, and scanned her face with eager scrutinizing glance.

"Child, how thin you've grown!" he said, with a break in his voice, as his lip quivered and his face grew stern. "Eric shall answer for this."

"Don't be hard on him, for he must be mad," too perfectly happy at that moment to wish for revenge.

"I almost hope he is," and then his face changed and his eyes softened. "You thought I was dead. Were you sorry?"

"Don't talk of it?" the tears rushing to her eyes.

"But now I've come back, my darling. Will you have me for better or worse?"

A convulsive start!

"You are engaged!" she gasped. "Have you forgotten Maude Allingham?"

"I've not forgotten her," with a happy laugh. "She's one of the best friends I ever had; but she has been engaged for years to Travers of the Blues, and she can't marry two men at once. Who put that into your head?"

"You said so yourself."

"That I swear I didn't."

"And Eric said so too."

"The scoundrel! Oh, Bren, the agony I suffered, when not a line nor a word came from you, and I was so beastly weak I couldn't get to you," holding her close to his heart. "I feel as if I could never let you go again. Say that you love me, and I'll marry you at once."

There was no need for words. She looked up at him with one swift glance of overmastering love, and then her head sank on his breast.

He bent over her, his lips pressed against her soft curls, his heart too full of happiness for speech, as he gathered her closer in his arms, longing to shelter her there for ever. She was weak through fasting and anxiety, and this sudden flood of joy seemed to bewilder her brain. Her knees knocked together, her lashes drooped on her white cheeks; and Cyril, leading her to the sofa, laid her gently to rest on the cushions.

Kneeling down by her, he saw in the dim light how wan and wasted the lovely face was, and his whole heart went out to her on a wave of tenderness and pity!

There was a knock at the door, and in walked Lady Sophia Fullerton, followed by Mary, who with tears in her eyes and smiles on her lips, had quietly resumed her former duties, and was bearing a pair of tall candlesticks in her shaky hands.

"I could not wait for you to call me, for I was sure you had forgotten me!" said Lady Sophia, with a smile. "Where is my poor child?"

"Here," said Cyril, hastily standing up. "I'm afraid it has been too much for her!"

"Poor child! what she must have been through!" exclaimed the mother in an awe-struck voice, as the tender kiss for which Brenda had so long waited in vain was imprinted on her unconscious forehead.

"Oh, my poor dear mistress!" cried Mary, depositing the candlesticks hastily on the first piece of furniture she came to, and flying to the sofa.

"I must come in, begging your pardon, but I can't wait no longer!" and Mrs. Seddon, plump as ever, pushed open the door, and bustled into the room. "Oh, Miss Brenda! my poor young lady, whatever have they done to you?" bursting into tears as she caught sight of the small white face which had haunted her dreams. "I've had that many nightmares about you that I couldn't rest, and Markham's just the same!"

Slowly Brenda opened her eyes, and saw all these kind faces around her. Was it a dream? No. Mary was kissing her hand, Mrs. Seddon was dropping tears down her strings, and Cyril was smiling fondly, with tenderest love in his eyes.

CHAPTER XL, AND LAST.

Mrs. DE BARRINGTON dashed into the Blue-room, unmindful of everything but the fright of the moment.

"It's all up with us!" she cried. "They've come and taken possession of the house, and we must be off!"

"Not Mr. Cyril Farquhar!" from Whistler, in a hoarse whisper.

"That's he, depend upon it. He flew at Miss Farquhar's door as if he would break it down."

Whistler gave a hurried glance at his master.

Sir Eric, perfectly unconscious of everything but the horror that possessed him, was staring straight in front of him, with eyes that seemed about to start from his head. His lips moved, but the meaning of the words that he muttered could scarcely be caught, for he spoke them too rapidly.

His face looked ghastly, without one touch of colour in it, for even the lips were white, and the sweat stood in large drops on his forehead.

"I don't see how I can leave him!" whispered the valet, for even his cold heart was touched with compassion.

"Do as you like!" with a flash of contempt. "I'm off. I don't see that there's any good to be got out of a madman!"

Whistler was revolted by the woman's gross selfishness, but he had not the moral courage to stay there by himself, so the two slunk off together, and heartlessly left their master to his fate.

Sir Eric was alone with the spectre!

As he woke to the fact that he was absolutely deserted, an icy chill came over him. His money could buy him faithful service so long as all went well with him; but when the hour of need came they all forsook him.

Rats run away from a falling house; but why should these people desert him? If they had stuck by him he could have paid them right royally on the morrow. But there would be no morrow now. He was alone with the fiend; and the fiend had come to take possession of him for the last time. There was no one to help him—no one to save him!

"Brenda! Brenda!" he cried, hoarsely, "come to me! for Heaven's sake come!"

But as soon as the words were spoken it flashed across him that he had looked her in, and she could not get to see him, even if she would.

Despair struck to the very marrow of his bones. His teeth chattered, his lips worked convulsively.

The menacing figure of his grandfather, with the lean, haggard face, and the cavernous eyes, seemed to his excited imagination to come nearer and nearer, till it reached the end of the sofa.

He dragged up his right leg, and clasped his arms round the knee, but he could not bend the other; that had to remain stretched out, with its foot in close proximity to that awful presence.

"I've come to fetch you," the figure seemed to say. "I've come to drag you down to the depths—your time is up."

"Oh, God have mercy!" cried the unhappy

man, in a wild prayer to the Heaven he had mocked and defied. "I'll give it back. Only give me time—time. I'm not ready yet!"

"Your time has come!" and one thin arm seemed stretched to seize him.

He could not go. In one wild flash there came across him the remembrance of his awful sins, and he dared not face his God. He cowered back as far as he could reach, and then with one loud gasping cry of utter agony, rolled over like a log, and fell face downwards on the floor.

Cyril, followed by Colonel Westbrook, dashed into the room, and stood for one instant in awe-struck silence, dazzled by the brilliant lights, and seeing nothing.

The next moment Cyril caught sight of the long dark heap upon the carpet, and sprang towards it. With gentle hands he lifted the heavy head, and looked down on the handsome face, so worn and haggard in the prime of manhood, with a sudden burst of pity, which seemed to smother the anger in his heart.

They had been boys together, and he thought of those happy years long ago, even whilst he looked up into the Colonel's grave face, and saw a confirmation of his worst fears.

Everything was done that could be done. Dr. Whitehead was sent for at once, a celebrated surgeon came down from London, but it was all too late; neither tender nursing nor surgical skill could save him now.

The leg which had been neglected on account of his evil plots revenged itself on its owner. The inflammation, which might easily have been subdued if taken in time, spread upwards to more vital parts, and his days were numbered.

It was touching to see the change which came over the Baronet in these last days. His brain grew clearer towards the end, and the horror of his spectral visions had worked so deeply on his mind that he was roused at last to true repentance for his crimes.

The Rev. Walter Willoughby, the rector of the parish, who had rarely been invited inside the doors of The Towers, was now a most welcome visitor; and in the consolations of the church Sir Eric's wild heart found peace—the peace that passeth understanding.

The title and estate at his death, which occurred soon afterwards, passed into the hands of Cyril Farquhar, but there were numerous legacies to all who had been kind to him.

Brenda had a considerable sum; Miss Moreland was enabled to live in comfort for the rest of her life; and Flossie Whitehead, to the surprise of her father, had a diamond ring, and a legacy of five hundred a year.

Most people thought this a delicate way of showing his appreciation of the doctor's devotion during his last illness; but Flossie guessed the true motive, and nearly cried her eyes out over the dead man's unexpected kindness. She had kept away from him all these months.

When invited to The Towers she had quite approved of her father's refusal to let her go; but her poor little heart hungered, nevertheless, for a sight of the face which had seemed to her the handsomest in the world, and when she heard she would never see it again she felt as if the sunshine of life had gone.

Brenda became Lady Farquhar, and the proud possessor of the family diamonds which had once graced the charming person of Lillian Wyndham. She made one of the sweetest brides that was ever seen, and Maude Allingham counted it a privilege to be her bridesmaid.

Sir Cyril and Lady Farquhar felt as if they had nothing left to wish for, as he bent his sunny head in Wilmington church, and called her for the first time by the sacred name of wife. Lady Sophia and her second husband, Mr. Fullerton, were both present at the wedding; so that Brenda no longer felt like a lonely stray, and the former had no doubts about her daughter's happiness, when she looked at the frank, good-looking face of her son-in-law. She said that if he had only



[KNEELING DOWN BY HER, CYRIL SAW HOW WAN AND WASTED THE LOVELY FACE WAS!]

come over to Vienna to ask for her daughter's hand in person, she could never have had the heart to refuse her consent, even if he had been the pauper which his cousin represented him to be.

She was amazed to think how easily she had been taken in by Sir Eric, and led to believe that her daughter would have the happiest home in Blankshire under his tender care.

Now she was ready to make any amends for her past neglect, and both she and her husband made Sir Cyril promise to bring his bride to Vienna before they settled down once more at The Towers, in order that she might make acquaintance with her half-brothers and sisters.

Sir Peter's picture was done up by an artist, and subsequently replaced in its old position over the mantelpiece in the study. The melancholy story connected with his death never transpired, and no one but Cyril, Brenda, and Mr. Willoughby knew that he had died by his own grandson's hand.

Paul Desborough had been nearly mad to think that Brenda Farquhar was in danger, and he was unable to stir a finger to help her. It was his entreaties, as well as Cyril's, that made Mrs. Wyndham attempt to return to The Towers. And when she failed, it was not only compassion, but the thought of his white, eager face that goaded her on to make a further effort.

When she returned to Brussels and told him of her courageous expedition in the darkness of night she gained her reward in his fervent gratitude.

Patiently and devotedly she nursed him through his long illness, and grudged no trouble if it were for his good, till he wondered, as he lay there day after day, if she really could be the same woman whom he had considered the most selfish as well as the most frivolous of her sex.

His recovery had been much impeded by

the anxiety of his mind, but the day came at last when he was pronounced well enough to leave the hospital.

He had thought over many things as he lay on his sick-bed, and came to the conclusion that he had often made rash and harsh decisions without well examining facts. This had induced him to question Lillian closely as to her life since they parted.

She admitted frankly that she had carried flirtation to its furthest limits, but that she had never ceased to remember that she was bound by the vows that she made at that foreign embassy, although they were not legally binding.

The first time she ever disowned them was when she consented to marry Sir Eric Farquhar, but her instinct had always told her that it was wrong, and she had only been too thankful to break it off.

"Now," she said, sadly, "I will go away, and never trouble you again. Only when you are in sorrow or sickness let me know, and I will come back to you at once."

"Good-bye, Lillian!" he answered, gravely. "You've been too good to me, and I wasn't worth it." Then he stooped, and kissed her small, white hands—and so they parted.

Poor Lillian! She felt as if she had no object left in her life when she turned her back on Brussels, and started for Paris. There was nothing to call her to Paris; but she might as well go there as anywhere else, so she engaged a charming *entreeol*, and pretended she was happy as a lark. But the days seemed so empty and the nights so long as she lay awake, and thought how different her life might have been if she had been a truer and more unselfish woman.

Meanwhile, Paul Desborough went here, there, and everywhere, like the wandering Jew, trying to master his love for Brenda Farquhar. He was determined to conquer it, for he had made up his mind that he was bound

in honour to marry the woman who had once thought herself his wife.

It was a hard fight, but he conquered at last, and one daimially wet day drove up in a dashing *coupé* to No. —, Rue St. Honore.

Lillian had been struggling against the dulness of the day, playing on the piano or taking up a book, but the piano or the player was out of tune, and the story failed to excite her interest. The door opened, and someone came quickly across the polished floor in the gathering dusk.

Her heart beat fast as she started to her feet, shaking like a leaf, and she could not have moved a step to save her life.

"I've come to ask you," he said, softly, as he held out his hands, "if you can make up your mind to try me again?"

No answer.

"Don't say 'Yes,' if you can't love me."

"Paul!"

That was all, but the little sob that accompanied the name said more than a chapter of words, and the next moment she was folded in Desborough's arms, and his fervent kisses were imprinted on her happy lips.

There was a grand ball about two months later given at The Towers, and Brenda Farquhar and Lillian Desborough were the two rival beauties. Maude Allingham was present, with Major Travers of the Blues, as her constant attendant; and Mary, the faithful maid, was as happy as a queen, for George had come back to fill his old place as his master's groom, and squire to his mistress's maid!

[THE END.]

HAPPINESS is like manna. It is to be gathered in grains and enjoyed every day; it will not keep; it cannot be accumulated; nor need we go out of ourselves or into remote places to gather it, since it is rained down from heaven at our very doors, or rather within them.



[EVELYNE'S WEARY HEART WAS AT REST AT LAST!]

NOVELETTE—concluded.]

THE SECRET OF THE GABLE END.

—30—

CHAPTER IV.—(continued.)

EVEN Mrs. Grath, who, being a privileged servant, was taken into her master's confidence, told him she was glad to hear it; but when she in turn confided it to old Thomas, he raised his eyebrows in astonishment, rattled his bones in every joint, and said if he were Mr. Girenstein he'd make a clean breast of it beforehand.

"I think you are right, Thomas," the other said, when, later on, he had knocked at the library-door, where Hugh was, and, on being told to enter, did so, entering also on the subject at once that was uppermost in his mind, being so anxious, as he told his master, to save him the misery it might cause in the future.

"And poor Miss Evie, so innocent of all, sir," he argued, "and to my idea, its her, Mr. Hugh, who'd have to suffer most."

But Hugh did not answer; he was thinking what he could say to Lady Aubrey, to Lionel, and even to Evie herself. How could he tell her of that dreadful barrier which stood between her and love?

"I think you are right, Thomas!" he repeated, as the old servant still pressed the point; "but you must give me time to turn it all over in my mind before I act."

"To turn it over in my mind," he repeated again, as if it were not always before my eyes, and he laughed, bitterly, "Oh, Heaven! will it ever be erased from my memory?"

He seemed to have forgotten Thomas's presence—forgotten all in that moment of his great agony but the skeleton, which seemed to meet him at every turn, the secret of his

life, which had made him an old man in the prime of his age.

But he could not forget, even when his despair was greatest, how he had once loved—loved even now the remembrance of what had been.

And then he thought of his innocent Evie, whom, in the first madness of his grief, he had determined to hate, but now he pitied, if he did not actually love her, and rather would he follow her to the grave than that she should know one-tenth of the misery which had been his.

He lifted his head then.

"You can go now, Thomas," he said; "but, remember, only from my lips is Miss Eva to know anything. Wait a moment, though, it must be near twelve, and this is Christmas Eve, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," the old man replied, with a shudder, "but we wants nothing to drink, Mr. Girenstein," for he had given him the keys of the wine-cellar, and then the chimes fell on their ears, and Hugh's face became hidden in his hands.

"You are going to bed, sir, ain't you?" Thomas asked, for his master raised his head then, and he saw how fearfully pale he had become.

"I have a little writing to do," he answered, "after which I shall go to rest."

But still the old man remained, and, notwithstanding Hugh's commands that he should leave the room, an irresistible force appeared to hold him to the spot.

"You have been a faithful servant to my father, Thomas, a friend, almost a second father to me. Should anything happen to me, and we never know, life is so uncertain," and he laughed a hard, unnatural laugh, "promise to take care of her unto the end. You shall be well repaid."

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Hugh. Me an old man on the verge of the grave, and you still young!"

"And you won't promise?" Hugh added, otherwise taking no heed of what he said.

"If it should please the Almighty to take you before me, sir, yes; though Heaven forbid it should be so. Good-night, sir."

For one moment their hands met, for Hugh had held his out to the faithful servant, and then the door closed between them, the sound of the distant bells alone entering within.

But it was long after that that Hugh Girenstein yet remained. He had drawn his chair to the table, now strewn with materials for writing, Christmas Day as it dawned still discovering him pen in hand, whilst he covered sheet after sheet with manuscript.

And there in the broad morning light they found him too, his sightless eyes open in death, whilst his fingers still retained in their cold grasp the pen with which he had written for the last time his own name! His own name! to that he could not bring his lips to unfold, and the bells of the little church where he had so often prayed bursting forth, in joyous peals, the birth of the Messiah!

CHAPTER V.

It was poor old Thomas who was the first to enter, and then it all came back to him—that strange longing not to leave his poor dead master when he held his hand for the last time.

But, though terrified as he was when he first came on him—that fixed stare in his lifeless eyes—he did not scream, but sent one of the stable lads direct to Mr. Manlop with a message he was required at the Hall at once. Mr. Girenstein was very ill; and then he told Mrs. Grath how matters were.

And when that gentleman came they took him to the library, and there the painful truth looked him in the face.

"He had complained of his heart for some

time since, doctor," Thomas said, casting an appealing look on the other.

And so Dr. Manlop, who had attended the family at Crome Hall for over thirty years, gave a certificate to the effect that he had been attending Hugh Girenstein for some time for that disease, which had terminated fatally; and the existence of a small blue pill that had fallen to the floor by the dead man's side was known to none but those two—Thomas and Mrs. Grath.

The pages to which, in his last moments, almost in his death agony, after having appended his signature, he had sealed and directed to Lady Aubrey, were taken care of by the doctor.

"I will see that her ladyship has them," he told Thomas, and then he remembered Evie.

She had not yet arisen, and it was arranged that he should break the news to her in the morning-room.

So he waited there, looking out on the prospect without, where the large flocks were slowly falling; and wondering whether there had been a curse on the family, to which so much trouble had come; only turning when, shortly after, the door opened, and Evie entered.

It was the first time she had seen Dr. Manlop since she was a child, and the colour flew to her face with the surprise his presence occasioned. But she only looked for a moment on the pretty figure before him, the rosy tint coming and going beneath her clear skin, and then he advanced, holding out his hand.

"You don't remember me, Miss Girenstein? You were so young when I saw you last, not much higher than that," raising his hand about three feet from the carpet.

"I think I remember you," placing her tiny pink palm within his. "You are Dr. Manlop, are you not? The nasty medicine I had to take at your orders made a deep impression on my memory," and she laughed; and then she asked: "Does papa know you are here, doctor?"

For a moment he was unable to answer her; but, seeing that his silence was already noticed,—

"Your father was not well, and it was to see him that I am here," he said.

"Poor, dear papa. I thought he looked ill last night; but it is nothing serious, is it?"

Her tone had become so anxious, for she could not fail to see that her companion was striving to hide something from her; when advancing she laid her hand upon his arm, looking up to his face the while.

"There is something behind, doctor, and you will not tell me. Is he so very ill?"

"Miss Girenstein, little Evie, as I used to call you," he said, as he looked down pityingly into her tearful eyes, "your father is dead."

The words came slowly from him, he all the time letting his hand to pass over her yellow hair, even as that father might have done.

"Dead!" she repeated, and then her grief found vent in heavy, bitter sobs.

He led her to the sofa, she unresistingly letting him place her that her head might rest on the velvet cushion, and there he watched her as she wept and sobbed in her terrible sorrow.

She became calmer after awhile; and then he told her, in answer to her questions, how it was Thomas had found him in the morning-light, still and cold by the table where he had been writing.

"And I to leave him to die alone," she said.

"My dear child, how could I, you, anyone, have thought he was so near his end? But here is Lady Aubrey's carriage; doubtless she has heard the sad news. Sorry tidings travel apace."

Evie rose then, following the doctor's gaze, to see Lionel alight.

It seemed to give her comfort when, a few minutes after, he entered the room, followed by Mrs. Grath, who was so anxious to know how Miss Evie had borne up against it. And

the tears streamed down her cheeks when he told her that Lady Aubrey had sent him to take her to the Court.

"My poor little love, my darling!" he said, "it is dreadful for you. If it is only for the day; you are better there than here. I am sure, doctor, you will agree to that, won't you?"

"Yes, I am sure she could not be in better hands than Lady Aubrey's; but, in the first instance, I must insist on breakfast. The child has not touched a morsel as yet."

And Mrs. Grath endorsed what Dr. Manlop said.

"You try, there's a dear!" she said, when Evie declared she could not eat anything.

"You shall see him to-morrow," was the promise given; when, on ascending to her own room shortly after, she had begged so hard to see her dead father.

Matilde was making preparations to accompany her young mistress, quite glad, as she said, to get away from the gloom of Crome Hall, where, if she remained much longer, she felt there would be the next funeral.

They were at the top of the stairs now, and Evie was clinging to Mrs. Grath. She felt happier when her motherly arms were around her; she was now all alone in the world.

"You'll feel better, dearie, after you have been with Lady Aubrey," the old woman was saying, and then suddenly the other started from her side.

"Hark! Miss Grath," she said, "what is it ails like that?" as the voice she had heard before fell on her ears.

"One of the girls," she answered, meaning the servants; but Evie could see that after she had spoken she had no further wish to keep her by her side, almost hurrying her departure.

"Captain Aubrey will wonder what has become of you, miss!" and then she withdrew her arms from around her, telling Matilde to be careful of her young lady, as she bade her good-bye.

It was still snowing, the villagers in twos and threes wending their way over the frozen ground to where the church, covered with ivy, stood in the distance, the bells ringing out so joyfully that they appeared to mock at the grief which had thrown its dark mantle over the inmates of the Hall.

Lady Aubrey was there to receive Evie when the carriage drove up, not a little surprised to find that Doctor Manlop should form one of the party.

"Poor child!" he said, when, after returning her ladyship's greeting, he led his young charge forward, Lionel following behind. "You can't be too kind to her, Lady Aubrey," her reply being to press the bereaved girl to her heart, and kiss away the tears which had arisen to her beautiful eyes.

"Tell me all about it," she said afterwards, when in the drawing-room, for Lionel had taken all the consoling that had to be done on his own shoulders, leaving the doctor and his mother to enter into other matters by themselves; Lord Aubrey, who could not bear to see a woman in tears, retiring to his library after the first meeting was over.

Dr. Manlop knew and was known by everyone in the vicinity of Aubrey Court and the Hall, having the entrée to most of the residences; and consequently on this occasion it was only natural her ladyship should look to him for that which she could not help regarding as a mystery.

"Hugh Girenstein was strange; had been strange, for many years previous to his death," she told her listener; "and she had often said she should never be the least astonished to hear he had gone out of the world in a strange way, not dying on his bed, as most people would. But that his heart was affected as you say, doctor, was the last thing I should have imagined."

"I did not myself suppose his end was so near," and he would have said more; but Lady Aubrey's eyes were fixed so intently on him

that he did not, further than to tell her of the packet the dead man had addressed to herself.

"Poor Hugh!" she said, the tears starting to her eyes, "we were such old friends," the superscription, written by his hand, now cold in death, bringing him so vividly to her imagination.

"What a fine young fellow he was when I first knew him," she went on. "It was on our wedding tour Lord Aubrey introduced him to me. They were old college friends and sworn allies, and I was quite glad to find we should be neighbours. Sometime after we had been married, three years or more, my husband told me that Girenstein was going to reside himself at the Hall (he had let it previously); in fact, that he was married, concluding his intelligence with—'poor devil,' and that was all I could get from him."

"Did you ever see his wife?" the doctor asked?

"Never," her ladyship answered. "Lord Aubrey objected to my calling, on the plea that he had made a *mésentente*, and could not expect the county families to receive an actress into their circle."

"However that may be, she was a lady."

"I believe so," Lady Aubrey answered; "and I conclude, feeling the slight she received more poignantly than she would otherwise have done, that was the reason she had for excluding herself from all society. They were, nevertheless, devoted to each other; and when, the following year, a son was born, Lord Aubrey could not resist congratulating him on the event, at the same time that he apologised for the mistake he had made in the past, and trusting we might be friends in the future. But it was Hugh's turn now to refuse our friendship, that is, so far as visiting went, saying Mrs. Girenstein's health was so delicate; it was more advisable she should remain in the retirement she had hitherto observed."

"And you saw no more of the family after?"

"I saw the child once," Lady Aubrey answered, "a lovely boy; my remark at the time being, he was too beautiful for this world. It seemed prophetic, the news of his death coming to us soon after, how in his sleep he had fallen from his nursery window, and was discovered in the morning with the snow wreaths forming around him."

Doctor Manlop did not reply at first; he was studying her ladyship's face.

"That was the story, my lady," he said.

"And Girenstein never held up his head after."

"No, poor fellow, and no wonder, his wife's death following so shortly on."

Dr. Manlop was again silent, only lifting his eyes until they met those of his companion, the while they said as plain as eyes could speak,—

"I wonder how much she really knows?"

He rose then, holding out his hand, and saying it was seldom a Christmas day saw him from home.

"I know, Lady Aubrey, you will cheer our little friend here!" but Lionel and Evie had disappeared when he turned to bid her good-bye, her ladyship discovering them shortly after in the inner drawing-room, forgetting, for the moment, in the happiness of each other's society, the trouble that had so recently shadowed their present.

CHAPTER VI.

"Don't worry her, Lionel, poor little girl," his mother said, when on her making her appearance he made believe to be showing Evie some sketches which he had made in the neighbourhood during the summer months. And then kissing away the tears which again gathered in her eyes, she told her to cheer up; she would return shortly.

Lady Aubrey felt she could not desist longer from reading the contents of the papers poor Hugh had written. That it must be something closely concerning, if not herself, at least the welfare of her son, she felt convinced,

the purport to be known to her alone in the first instance.

And as she in her boudoir was perusing in wonder, almost terror, the words penned by Hugh Girenstein in the hour of his bitterest anguish, Lionel was breathing the love of his heart into the ears of the girl drawing so near to him in the time of her affliction, little dreaming of the dread truth which was arising as a grim monster of evil between them.

"I wish I felt there was no mystery in my life, Lionel," Evie was saying, "I should then feel so secure in your love; but when I love you most a something I cannot describe seems to throw a shadow around me of coming ill!"

She shuddered so perceptibly then, that drawing her nearer towards him,—

"Your nerves are unstrung, my darling!" he said. "What can come between us? And I swear, Evie, no power on earth shall part us, if by so doing you will feel happier."

"It is not your love I doubt, dear; but ever since I can remember, Lionel, a shadow seemed thrown across my path, for ever separating me from those I held most dear. My mother I never knew, and my childhood was spent among strangers; and now death has robbed me of my only parent."

Her grief broke out afresh then, the young soldier consoling her as best he could, when Lady Aubrey returned.

She was very pale, regarding Evie with a certain tenderness, which spoke of pity newly-arisen.

She could not fail to see the impress the day's grieving had left on the youthful features—a girl, almost a child, she thought—and to have such a weight of care, when all should be so bright around her.

She made but a casual remark, then turned to hide the emotion which filled her eyes with tears, blinding them as she saw before her a bleared landscape on which the white snow rested, wondering the while how she could find it in her heart to tell her all.

But she was glad when the day ended. It had been so miserable—the servants even, who had waited at the almost silent dinner, declaring such another Christmas, and they would quit his lordship's service; and not less glad was Evie to say good-bye, for she felt it was her presence which was throwing such a gloom over the entire household.

"I ought not to have come," she said, when Lady Aubrey kissed her at the last. "It was selfish, wicked, to make you all so unhappy."

"It would have made no difference, my dear! We heard of your trouble almost as soon as you knew of it yourself, and could not have enjoyed ourselves with a friend lying dead so near!"

Her ladyship left her then, telling Lionel to see her to the carriage, for she knew it was the remembrance of his hand-pressure that she would like to carry with her, to give her strength in the future.

Mrs. Grath was in the entrance-hall when she returned, divesting her of her wraps with all the tenderness and love of a devoted servant.

"You will let me see him now, won't you?" Evie asked?

And so the old housekeeper led her up the stairs past her own room—the one Hugh had prepared for her but a few months since—to where, in that he had always occupied, he now lay in his last long sleep.

But, when they entered, Evie uttered a cry of terror, and even Mrs. Grath started as in the gloom they detected a figure—that of a woman—leaning over where the dead lay.

But she did not move, apparently unconscious of the presence of others as they approached, paying no heed, the tones of her voice as it waivered forth, in a sad, mournful strain, the only sound she apparently heard in that silent chamber.

Evie clung more closely to her companion's

side, recognising in that one moment the voice she had heard in her sleep.

But she could not speak; her tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of her mouth, and so she only moved to the other side where the coffin was placed.

The stranger raised her head then, and like as in a nightmare Evie would have spoken, but could not, for it was her own face which appeared to be gazing into hers.

She had finished her song then.

"He had called me so long, I could not keep away," she said, addressing Mrs. Grath; and then she stooped, until her lips touched the cold forehead, when, with a sigh, almost a groan, she turned away.

But before doing so she had extinguished the waven light which burnt over where the dead lay, and it was with difficulty that Evie and her companion retraced their steps.

Matilde was waiting outside.

"Did you see a woman pass?" she asked Mrs. Grath, in her broken English. "She brushed close by me as she came from that room," pointing to the door they had now shut behind them.

But neither made her any answer, the housekeeper only telling her sharply to see to her young lady, who would be quite ill if she did not have her proper rest; and Evie, like one in a dream, following on, led by circumstances over which she felt unable to exercise any control.

The next day she was too ill to leave her room, Mrs. Grath becoming so alarmed that Dr. Manlop was summoned without delay.

"She is in a high state of fever," he said. "Has anything beyond her father's death occurred to account for it?" And when Mrs. Grath told him what happened, he shook his head dubiously as to the result on one of her nervous temperaments.

"She must be kept extremely quiet," he impressed on Matilde, who would not be debarred from nursing the poor girl; "the least excitement, and I would not answer for the consequences."

And so, when Hugh Girenstein was laid to rest in the vault of his fathers, his only child was tossing to and fro on a sick bed, talking wildly in her delirium of those events which had so lately transpired.

"Poor little girl!" Lady Aubrey had said, when the sad news was brought to the Court, afterwards, at her son's request, making daily inquiries; and even when the danger was past, and visitors were allowed, going herself to see how sadly changed she had become in those last few weeks succeeding Hugh's death.

Mrs. Grath invariably met her ladyship when her carriage drove up to the Hall, herself conducting her to Evie's room.

It was on one of these occasions that Lady Aubrey noticed how terribly excited the poor old woman was.

"Miss Evie, she is not worse, is she?" she asked, her first thought flying to the little invalid.

"No, my lady, it is not that," she answered, wringing her hands the while, "but—" and then she stopped.

"You can trust me, Grath," her ladyship said; "your late master and I were great friends," and she placed her tiny gloved hand on the wrinkled one of the housekeeper.

"I did not know, my lady," and she still hesitated even then, fearful to betray the trust of the dead man.

"You have been faithful servants, you and Thomas, and his last thought was that you should never know, in one sense, that he was gone."

"Yes, yes, my lady, I know that," and the tears gushed to the lustreless eyes; "he left us well provided for—Thomas and I. We have no care like that," the housekeeper continued, thinking Lady Aubrey had misheard the trouble she even then feared to convey.

"He also entrusted you with a sacred trust, the burden of which you had borne, in unison with himself, for years," she continued. "Tell

me, is it in connection with that you are now troubled?" and she looked kindly into the withered face; down which the tears were now flowing freely.

"You know then, my lady?" the poor woman sobbed, "and I thought it was only us two."

"The night your master died," Lady Aubrey replied, her voice shaking with emotion, "he wrote a brief outline of the history of his life, directing it to me; for, honourable to the last, he would not permit our families to be allied by marriage without my being in full possession of facts. Tell me now, without hesitation, what is this fresh trouble, that I may do all in my power to relieve it?"

"She is gone, my lady, and I am in a dreadful fear, for there's not a nook or corner in the house that we have not searched, and to no purpose."

Her ladyship looked very grave.

"When did you first miss her?" she asked.

"This afternoon, my lady, not long before you came. I had just been in to see Miss Evie, when, hearing the door leading to the Gable End swinging backwards and forwards, I wondered how it could be, feeling sure I had locked it on passing through a short time before; but on putting my hand into my pocket I found the key was not there, so knew I must have left it in the lock, and, on going back to see, found such was the case. I did not give it much heed, though, not until later, on discovering, to my dismay, that the room she occupied was vacant."

"Have you been to that Mr. Girenstein assigned to his own use?"

"There is not a corner in the whole house, my lady, I have not sought out."

And so it was, inquiries being set on foot by her ladyship to ascertain whether a strange woman had been seen in the neighbourhood.

But it was of no avail. The unfortunate creature who had been the housekeeper's sole charge for so many years had as completely disappeared as though she had never been.

CHAPTER VII.

BUT on Mrs. Grath her disappearance had the greatest effect; Evie, who had never known of her existence, having during those three weeks that had elapsed since her father's funeral gradually returned to health.

She was still very pale and thin; and when her mind—which it would do at times—recurred to the events preceding her illness, the tears—from weakness mostly—would start to her eyes.

Lionel begged so hard to see her then that his mother at last yielded; and so touched was she with the meeting between them that—as she told Lord Aubrey afterwards—she could not find it in her heart to separate them.

"You are like all women," his lordship returned, allowing sentiment to prevail over common sense; "but on one point I am determined—and that is, Lionel shall be made acquainted with the entire facts; and then (for I quite agree with what Dr. Manlop says, that there is no tendency on the part of Evie to inherit that malady which made her father's life a misery), should he still be of the same mind with regard to making her his wife, I will raise no obstacle to the union, though, Heaven knows, I would have wished it otherwise!" he mentally observed.

So on their return to the Court the young guardaman was told her ladyship wished to see him in her private room.

Lionel wondered what was in the wind now, as he expressed it, for it was only on most important matters that Lady Aubrey ever saw him there.

"Sit down, Lionel," she said, when he had entered, pointing to a chair on the opposite side of the table to her own, which was drawn close to the fire. "I have something very serious to say to you; but it so closely affects your future that I am bound, painful as it is,

to put you in possession of facts of which you are in entire ignorance."

"Relating in anyway to Evie?" he asked, an angry flush for the moment rising to his face, not unobserved by his mother, who continued,—

"It relates to your proposed marriage, Lionel, so far that we—your father and myself—consider it our duty to hide nothing from you before it is too late."

"Surely you would not have me act dishonourably, whatever it may be?" he asked, impatiently.

"We extort nothing from you. We only inform you of that which her dead father in his last moments confided to us."

"Is it imperative that I should know it?" he demanded.

"It is better that you should for her sake equally as your own!"

Her ladyship's argument had the desired effect, and Lionel prepared himself to hear what communication it was his mother had to impart.

"Poor Hugh," she commenced, "wrote to me the night before he died!" Lady Aubrey added, after a pause.

"We were old friends, and, feeling that his end was not far off, he wrote me a full history of his unhappy marriage; for, notwithstanding the happiness an alliance with the family of his oldest friend would have brought to him personally, he would not permit his daughter to enter into it until we were in possession of the secret which had thrown such a gloom over his own life."

Lionel was listening attentively now, though the convulsive twitching of his features spoke of the excitement under which he was labouring, when Lady Aubrey, selecting some papers from those which were strewn before her, read what it was Hugh Girenstein had written in the time of his greatest despair.

"It was when travelling with a former tutor, who, on attaining my majority, had consented to my father's proposition that he should act Mentor to my Telemachus in a tour I proposed making of the Continent of America previous to my settling down, as he termed it, to spend my life with him at Crome Hall, that the sad story of my life commenced."

"I was just on the eve of starting when the death of this, my only parent occurring, I was thus, by force of circumstance, compelled to delay my departure, and it was six months later, when leaving Mrs. Graith and old Thomas in charge, I, in company with Arnold Slipper, left England. Young, rich, in possession of everything to render life enjoyable, there was nothing to mar the pleasure I derived from my new experiences. Not less so Arnold. But to you, dear Lady Aubrey, a description of my travels can have no interest, so I will pass them over until at Boston the crisis in my life commenced."

"An operatic company was taking the town by storm, comprised as it was of the best singers of the day. I was always desperately fond of music, and the treat (judging from what the critics said) was one I determined to avail myself of, the more so that the Bostonites, at all times not easy to please, were most loud in their praise of the different artistes."

"There's a new contralto beats all I ever heard," my neighbour in the dress-circle informs me, with a broad American twang; "and I guess you'll say so too."

"Mlle. Evelyne Hernita, that's the one," he continued, showing me the name on his programme. And when, later on, that lady appeared, the thunder of applause which greeted her was sufficient in itself, knowing as I did that Boston people were not, as a rule, an enthusiastic race, to tell me my American friend had not over-rated the powers she possessed."

"It is needless to tell you, Lady Aubrey, that night after night found me at the theatre; for not only was Evelyne gifted with a magnificent voice, but nature had endowed her with the beauty of form and face such as

is given to few, and I became so deeply enamoured that nothing short of an introduction would satisfy me."

"Arnold finding it was useless to endeavour to dissuade me, informed me at last that he thought he could obtain it for me, as he had done a slight service for the manager (he did not tell me what), and he was, in a degree, under an obligation to him. Besides, my purse was at the service of my Mentor to an unlimited control."

"The weeks following that evening on which her hand for the first time was placed in mine passed like a dream. The passion I evinced she fully returned, and I was in a seventh heaven, when, at my expressed wish, she left the stage and became my wife."

"We had made arrangements to return to England, when, one morning, Arnold came to my dressing-room, exclaiming himself by saying he knew he could speak to me privately there."

The characters here were so blotted and indistinct that Lady Aubrey could well imagine the agony the dead man must have endured when committing this portion to paper.

"'Had your father been living,' he said, when I asked him the cause of the agitation under which he was suffering, 'I dare not have shown my face in England; but as Heaven is my judge, I was as innocent as a babe in the matter.'"

"What on earth, man, do you mean?" I asked, for the moment losing my temper.

"And then he told me that the woman I loved, almost worshipped, had been confined in a lunatic asylum but a few months before I had made her my wife."

"She is sane enough now, at any rate," I answered, turning away my head that he should not see the effect his communication had had on myself, feeling in that moment that it was my own brain that was most likely to give way."

"A gentle knock came to the door then, and Evelyne entered, looking so little like a mad-woman that I laughed at my own folly at being cajoled into giving credence to a story evidently fabricated by the manager in revenge for having deprived him of his greatest star, knowing, as I well did, the loss he had sustained in consequence."

"Why, what is it Mr. Slipper has been saying, Hugh?" she asked. "You look not a bit like your own dear self," when Arnold, seeing he was not wanted, made some flippant remark, and saying he supposed he should see us again during the day, left."

"However, according to my expressed desire, he instituted inquiries, for, notwithstanding my disbelief in the report, it had made me uneasy, and all that time I was living in a fool's paradise with my beautiful Eve."

"I will not weary you, Lady Aubrey, with details, suffice it to say Arnold's story was only too true. The time had been, when under a stress of study, my darling's brain had given way; but as such was not likely to be the case again, a celebrated physician, whom I consulted, comforted me with the assurance that there was not the slightest chance of a return of the malady, an absence of any undue excitement being the surest safeguard against it."

"It was then we returned to Crome Hall, leading a life of the strictest retirement. A year after my boy was born, and so happy was I in my secluded life that I seemed but to exist for those two—my wife and child."

"But when Archie had reached his third year a little daughter came, and then—"

Here the page was so blotted that it was almost impossible for Lady Aubrey to decipher the writing; and Lionel waiting, his head resting on his hand, his face white and drawn, to hear the end.

"Christmas morning! How well I remember it!" (the paper went on), "the bells ringing out their Christmas greeting, sounding in my ears like the tongues of fiends, as I crushed the frozen snow beneath my feet, hurrying

on with those who had seen him first to where my little son lay—his golden head resting on the cold, white ground, where the snow-flakes were fast covering his rounded limbs."

"How he came there none knew, but the pale stars which looked down on his baby face, and the bitter frost that kissed his infant lips. They took him to the house then, and I, hiding my terrible grief as best I could, went to Evelyne."

"But there was no need to tell her—even gently as I would have done so. She knew already. And then it came to me all at once, so suddenly, that I marvel I was not the same."

"My wife was mad!"

"But I could not put her from me, and so I had a disused portion of the house assigned for her use—Graith and Thomas the only two who knew the secret of the Gable-end."

"She was so quiet—almost painfully still—only now and then breaking into snatches of song, as her mind reverted to the past; but with regard to me her memory had become a blank."

Lady Aubrey refolded the paper then—poor Hugh's last words—raising her eyes to where Lionel was still thinking deeply.

And then a girlish voice was heard without. The door opened, and when her ladyship arose it was to enfold Evie Girenstein in her embrace.

The coincidence for the moment struck forcibly on the imagination of the young officer, recalling to his recollection, as it did, that episode referred to in her father's writing, and for a second his resolution faltered."

Evie saw it, too—the change in his demeanour towards her, when, advancing towards the table, her eyes fell for an instant on the closely-written leaves still left there by Lady Aubrey, who had omitted to remove them when her name was announced."

And then the page, on which were the words, "My wife was mad," in Hugh Girenstein's handwriting, was so placed she could not avoid reading it."

Lionel and his mother had seen it too, but it was too late then, Evie standing, as she did, looking from one to the other, and wondering if her mother's curse was upon her also."

But she did not scream, she did not faint, only standing there for a short moment to recover the strength which had just then forsaken her, leaving her so white there as she stood. And then she pointed to the dreaded line."

"Is that true, Lady Aubrey?" she asked. "You must excuse my reading it, but it was my father's writing, and it was so placed I could not avoid seeing it."

Then her ladyship, unable at the time to reply, turned to Lionel."

"I have no need to repeat the question," she said. "Oh, Heaven! it is only too true."

She covered her face then, and he could see the tears trickling through her fingers, but she did not shrink at his approach. She only nestled the closer to his side, the while she felt his strong arm encircling her waist; and then, when he called her by name, she looked up."

"My darling, my darling! I give you back your troth," she sobbed; "but I shall love you to my life's end. Kiss me, Lionel, and then good-bye!"

"And do you think I would give you up like this, Evie?" he asked. "My mother, my father, they are both ready to take you to their arms! Would you think that I should be the one to stand aloof?"

She raised her head from his shoulder, looking into his face, the lovelight beaming in her eyes, and the heavy lashes where the tears still rested, and then she moved to where Lady Aubrey was making vain efforts to restrain her emotion."

"Is this true, Lady Aubrey?" she asked, throwing herself on her knees by her side. It was the second time she had asked the same question; but now with what different feelings she awaited her reply."

"It is true, Evie?" and raising the girl from where she still remained at her feet, the older woman enfolded her within the clasp of her outstretched arms.

"My more than mother!"

It was all Evie could say; but in those few moments Lady Aubrey felt she had, indeed, found a daughter!

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER than that which chance had disclosed to her Evie Girenstein knew nothing of her mother's history; and when she would have asked respecting it Lady Aubrey would tell her there was nothing to learn beyond that the shock occasioned by the death of her brother when she was an infant had robbed her of her reason.

But week succeeding week without bringing any intelligence of the poor fugitive her ladyship had expressed her fears to Mrs. Grath that she was dead.

"Not so my lady," the old woman would say. "If it were so discovery of her poor body would sure to have been made. No, she has found shelter somewhere, I feel certain of that, and it won't be much longer before we have some news of her."

But each day passed with the same result, until it was considered useless to postpone the wedding longer, Hugh's death having up to then answered as an excuse to the young people for the delay.

The weather was still intensely cold, even more so than at Christmas, notwithstanding that the trees had already commenced to burst forth into leaf; whilst the snow, as though anxious to destroy their young life, fell remorselessly, covering them in virgin white.

It was then that the news for which Mrs. Grath had waited so long came.

An old woman had called, one of the under-servants had told her, who wanted to see her on particular business. And so she was shown into her private sitting-room, where the housekeeper awaited her.

She was a tidy soul, evidently the wife of some labouring man, dropping a courtesy after the way of country folks when shown into the presence of the other.

"You are Mrs. Grath?" she asked, not proceeding farther until she had received her answer.

"I am," the housekeeper replied.

"And you know this?" at the same time bringing from her dress pocket a diamond ring of great beauty.

"Yes, yes," she answered, excitedly, and then she implored her to tell her how it came in her possession.

"The poor creature to whom it belonged made me take it," she said, "as a recompense for the food and shelter I had given her. She should not want it, she told me, for she was going home—to Crome Hall I understood her; and so I kissed her, and bid her good-bye, but somehow, after she was gone I didn't feel easy like; she looked so sad, and so I thought I'd come along and see if she were really here."

The woman ceased then, to wipe away the tears which had risen to her eyes, but they flowed afresh when Mrs. Grath, equally affected, told her that she had never been there.

"I am so afraid she has made away with herself," the other sobbed; "she seemed so melancholy like."

It was the same dread which had taken possession of the housekeeper too, but she did not express her fears to the visitor, telling her she would doubtless return yet. She would often wander from place to place, and inquiries should be made at once.

But she knew they would not have far to seek, and so she bid the woman good-day, thanking her, and her heart beating the while until she thought it must have been audible to the other.

And then, when the little old figure had

dropped another curtsey and departed, she called Thomas, imparting to him the fears which her tale had engendered.

A short time after and they were both toiling over the snow-covered roads, their aged limbs aching with cold and fatigue, but they heeded it not, only reaching their destination before the darkness of eventide had set in.

And then they stayed, each supporting the other, as there before them beneath the eaves of the village church where the ivy grew, on the icy stone, covered thick and white with fresh-fallen flakes, which led to the tomb of the Girensteins, lay her of whom they were in quest.

Yes, true to the end to the one love of her life, the weary heart was at rest at last. Evelyn Girenstein had indeed gone home.

Faithful even to the dead, the two old servants lingered still by the lifeless form, till the shadows of the fast approaching night warned them they had yet much to do.

So they each knelt for one moment, reverently kissing the lifeless clay, and then they turned from the spot to summon assistance.

But to all, save Lady Aubrey, it was a mystery as to who the poor creature was, who had passed away unknown in the stillness of the quiet churchyard.

AFTER THE LAPSE OF YEARS.

Christmas once more, with its holly and mistletoe, its ice-bound rivers and snow-covered hills, and all around Crome Hall it is much the same, as when, ten years since, Evie Girenstein entered there, leaning on her father's arm, in the fresh young beauty of her seventeen years.

But she is Lady Lionel Aubrey now, for the old lord has joined the great majority, and his son has succeeded to the title, though, in compliance with the wish of his young wife, they still look upon the old Hall as their home, the Dowager Lady Aubrey making the Court her residence.

"But you must come to us to-morrow, you know," Evie had said when bidding her good-bye on Christmas Eve, and kissing her pale cheek, which had grown very wan and thin during those ten years had glided by. "The children will be so unhappy if you refuse"—an argument which had more sway with her ladyship than any other.

And so the room where the tree was to be placed, laden with gifts that Santa Claus had sent, was decorated with evergreens, and over it grandmamma was the presiding goddess, who distributed them to the baby hands extended to receive them.

And then the bells—the same as had rang out those ten years since—rang out again in joyous peals, and the infant heir to Aubrey Court was brought in to have one peep, as Mrs. Grath said, her step scarce less tottering than his own—for it might be the last time that her old eyes would rest on those faces so dear to her; for she felt the day was close at hand when she would be called upon to go the road that faithful Thomas had gone before.

[THE END.]

Love has all variations in its quality, from the selfish and self-seeking passion that in its sacred name would sacrifice the happiness and the welfare of its object, up to the purest affection of the devoted mother who would secure the good of her child at any personal cost.

It is a truth never to be overlooked that good increases and triumphs through the emphasis laid upon it, while evil dwindles and decays by silence and neglect. Whoever wishes to abolish anything wrong or unseemly will best succeed, not by dwelling upon it in his own mind, and giving it prominence in his conversation, but rather by treating it with silence, and laying his stress upon the opposite virtue or good, which by its very presence will quietly dispel the evil.

ROSALIND'S VOW.

—10:—

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ON GUARD.

MR. CAUSTON felt that, in warning Sir Kenneth, he had acted less with the caution of a detective than the honour of a gentleman; but still he thought so much was due to the Baronet, and he was glad he had paid it. After that he was at liberty to make his own plans, and set about the task of tracking Rosalind in the way he liked best.

The more he thought over the murder the more convinced did he feel that she could throw light upon it. Of course, his professional career had taught him that strange coincidences do exist still; he was inclined to look upon her disappearance from the White House, on the very night the murder was committed, as something more than a coincidence. She knew the errand Claud was going on, and what might she not have discovered by simply using her wits, when the only check upon her was a blind woman?

"All women are avaricious, and all women are crafty," Mr. Causton said to himself. Then the remembrance of Janet flashed across his mind, and caused him to modify his opinion. "At any rate, a good many women are—not all, perhaps. Here we have a lady separated from her husband, apparently poor, and said to be beautiful. Who knows what her friends were? It is more than probable she was in collusion with some man, and that man committed the murder."

Thus he reflected, as he lay back in his corner of the railway carriage, furtively watching the dark, handsome features of the Baronet, who was opposite him. And then he continued his meditations.

"It is possible Sir Kenneth knows where she is, and if so he will at once warn her. That is, of course, the object that made him leave Weir Cottage so suddenly. Even if she were an accomplice of the murderer, and her husband knew it, he would naturally do his best to shield her, for the sake of his name. I must keep him well in view for the next forty-eight hours, and at the end of that time I shall, no doubt, have something definite to go upon."

Then he relit his cigar, and his destination was reached without any further conversation passing between him and Sir Kenneth. Indeed, the latter read, or pretended to read, his newspaper very assiduously, and hardly raised his eyes from it until the arrival at Paddington, where he alighted and called for a hansom.

Causton took up his rug and portmanteau, and stood as if in indecision until Sir Kenneth had entered his cab, and given orders to the driver to take him to the hotel in Piccadilly. Then, and not till then, the lawyer hailed a four-wheeler, and gave to the caddy exactly the same directions as the Baronet had given, after which he sprang in, and instantly began to occupy himself with the contents of the hand-bag he had brought with him.

From the bag he took a curious collection of articles—a hand-glass, a lamp, a grey wig and whiskers, a pair of spectacles, and the long coat, high waistcoat, and soft felt hat of a high church cleric.

A four-wheeled cab, even when it is the roomiest of its species, does not afford very ample accommodation as a dressing-room, but the lack of space did not seem to inconvenience Causton in the very smallest degree. With a swiftness and dexterity that would have moved to admiration an onlooker—had one chanced to be present—he divested himself of a great part of his attire, and assumed the clerical coat and waistcoat; then began the transformation of his face, which the whiskers and spectacles effected very completely, even without the aid of the grey wig. He grinned complacently as he regarded

himself in the hand-glass by the light of his small lamp.

"Pretty fair, considering the circumstances," he muttered, after which he bundled the clothes he had taken off into a bag, and hardly had he done this when the cab stopped in Piccadilly.

The driver stared hard as he saw the middle-aged parson emerge from the cab, in lieu of the young-looking man who had entered it; but Causton pressed a double fare into his hand, and he drove slowly off, his mouth screwed up very suggestively, and his left eye winking violently.

Causton's object was to get rooms in the same hotel as Sir Kenneth, without attracting the latter's attention, and this he was enabled to do with perfect success,—for the Baronet was by no means a suspicious man; and it never struck him that the benevolent old parson whom he met in the hall could possibly be one and the same as Richard Causton, solicitor, with whom he parted at Paddington; neither did he notice that, as he strolled out of the hotel, the clergyman always kept about the same distance after him.

Causton was brought to a standstill when Sir Kenneth entered the house into which Pierce Vansittart had just gone. He dared not venture upstairs for fear of detection, but he waited patiently enough near the entrance, and he saw Diana Blackmore drive up in a cab, get out, and disappear through the open doorway.

The housekeeper was deeply veiled, so that no glimpse of her features could be obtained; but her tall and commanding figure, and a certain nameless grace in her carriage, made Causton jump to the conclusion that she was none other than Lady Hawtrey herself!

It must be remembered that he had never seen Rosalind, but she had been described to him by Claud as tall and stately—the sort of person one would turn to look at if one met her in the street. Diana answered perfectly to this description, so the lawyer's mistake was by no means unnatural.

"The pursuit has not been difficult," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands gleefully. "In all probability she lives here, and Sir Kenneth has lost no time in warning her. I don't know that I can do much more to-night, but, at any rate, I'll wait half-an-hour longer and see what happens."

What happened was that the Baronet presently came down with the lady, whom he followed into a cab. The address given to the driver was in too low a tone for Causton to hear; so as he determined not to let them out of his sight, he had no alternative but to follow the cab—for the second time that evening.

It was a dark night—no moon, no stars; and after leaving the more frequented and well-lighted thoroughfares, the task of keeping the first hansom in view was somewhat difficult, especially as the second horse was by no means a swift steed, and had a decided objection to going in an opposite direction to his stables—at that time of night—or, rather, to speak more correctly, morning.

Causton grew impatient. He had thrown himself heart and soul into the elucidation of the "Crowthorne mystery," and so far success seemed to have attended his efforts. It would be too aggravating if he lost sight of Sir Kenneth and Lady Hawtrey at this critical moment!

At last the driver pulled up, and as Causton thrust his head out of the window, said,—

"Werry sorry, sir, but my 'oash has cast a shoe. He's dead lame, and I can't take him on any further."

The pseudo-clergyman felt very much inclined to swear, but his own observation verified the cabman's words; and so there was nothing to be done but get out, and walk the rest of the distance—and how far it might be he had not the remotest idea.

The hansom was still in sight, and, luckily for Causton's purpose, was not going at a very

quick pace. He determined to follow on foot—for there was no other vehicle of any kind in sight, and no prospect of one appearing.

By dint of running the lawyer managed for some time to keep the cab in view; then the driver whipped up his horse, and the animal started off at a trot. Try as he would, Causton could not keep up, and very soon found himself hopelessly behind.

It says a good deal for his pluck that he did not at this juncture turn back, and go to the hotel again; but he was not lightly discouraged, and he kept on, thinking that, in all likelihood, the cab, when dismissed, would return along the same road.

His surmise proved correct. In about half-an-hour's time he saw a hansom being driven towards him, and at once stopped the driver, who was cross and sleepy, and not in a mood to be questioned.

But the hardest gate may be unlocked by means of a golden key, and Causton possessed that somewhat rare faculty of knowing when to be generous. As he saw the glint of gold the cabman unbent, and not only told his inquirer where he had deposited his fare, but offered to drive him there—an offer that the lawyer at once accepted.

"Don't drive actually to the gate," he said, as he got in; "stop about three dozen yards on this side of the house."

"What a frightfully dismal spot!" was his first thought, as he alighted, and looked round. "One might be robbed and murdered and thrown into the river, and no one be any the wiser."

He exercised considerable caution while going down the long path between the trees that led to the house itself, stepping with the lightness and silence of a velvet-shod cat. And it was fortunate for him that he did so, for as he came near the house, a twig cracked under his feet, and a voice close at hand said, in a low whisper,—

"Is that you, sir?"

He did not answer—did not even stir. He knew that it was impossible to distinguish his figure in the dense shadow in which he stood, and the whereabouts of his interlocutor he could only guess by the sound of the voice.

There was a pause, then a muttered curse from the bushes on the right, and after that the sound of footsteps, apparently leaving the spot.

"Curious," murmured Causton. "I don't quite understand it. I wonder if it has anything to do with my case?"

When he got out of the plantation he found the side of the house that faced it in total darkness, but on going round to the front he observed a light in one of the windows; but the blind was down, and there were heavy iron bars across the casement, so that nothing was visible.

He determined to carry his investigations further. Experience had taught him the wisdom of knowing the exact geography of a place, and so he walked slowly down the path that led to the river, groping his way along more by instinct than by anything else—for there were so many trees in the garden that they excluded what little light there was.

The river was just visible in the obscurity—flowing on, dark and silently, towards the distant sea. But what was that at the bottom of the steps? A boat! surely, and in it a man smoking a pipe. His features it was impossible to distinguish, and but for the dull, red glow of the tobacco in the pipe he might have passed unnoticed.

Causton withdrew as silently as he had come. An idea had struck him. Was this boat in waiting to take Lady Hawtrey away, and so to elude pursuit? It did not seem unlikely, considering the circumstances; and, viewing it in this light, the lawyer was more than ever convinced that his suspicions of her were not groundless.

He resolved to wait patiently until events developed themselves—till morning came if

need be. Every moment made him more interested, and more determined to solve the mystery. He took up his position behind a shrub, close to the door, so that no one could come in or go out without his observing them, and he had not waited long before he heard the distant sound of wheels. They paused, then drove away, and a few minutes later a man's hasty footsteps came down the pathway.

When he reached the gravel in front of the house the man stood still, and gave a long, low whistle, with the result that he was almost immediately joined by another man.

"So it's you at last," said the second comer, in a grumbling voice. "I've been waiting for the last two hours and more. I thought you were never coming, and I'm almost perished with the cold."

"It's not my fault," returned Vansittart—for it was he. "I could not come before for the simple reason of physical inability. A man with whom I had a dispute followed me to my rooms, and then brutally assaulted me. I was insensible for some time, and it was with some difficulty that I got here at all. If I had not been determined to keep to our original plans, I should have stayed quietly at home, and let matters take their chance."

"Then you are still resolved to take the lady aboard?"

"More resolved than ever," exclaimed Vansittart, with a savage oath; and our readers will guess that his desire to humiliate Sir Kenneth was increased tenfold by the events of the evening.

"The mischief of it is, that I have either lost or been robbed of my pocket-book and keys," he added, "and so I can't get in the house."

"Ring the bell," suggested Causton, very naturally. "Mrs. Blackmore will open the door."

"She won't, for the very sufficient reason that she is not there. By this time she is in Yorkshire with her sister."

"Then you mean to say the lady is in the house alone?"

"Exactly—and more than that, she is locked in her room, so that if I were to ring till doomsday she could not come down to open the door. The only thing is to get in through the conservatory. I don't suppose the shutters are up at the French window. At any rate, we will try there first."

Causton listened to this colloquy with increasing amazement. The speaker evidently was not aware of Sir Kenneth's presence in the house; and who was "the lady locked in her room?"

The mystery thickened with each moment, and every nerve in the lawyer's body was quivering with excitement. He was like a war-horse, panting for the fray, as he crept stealthily after the two men on their way to the side of the house where the conservatory was situated.

Vansittart's surmise was correct. The glass door was shutterless, and by dint of breaking a pane of glass—a task which Causton effected with so much adroitness as to suggest a previous experience in such matters—the key was readily taken out of the lock inside, and the door opened. Then the two men entered.

CHAPTER XL.

ROBALIND'S ATONEMENT.

OUT of an instinctive delicacy, that much buffeting with the world and its evil ways had been powerless to eradicate, Diana Blackmore retired from the room when she found that the interview between husband and wife promised to be one at which no third person should assist. Besides this, she had her own affairs to attend to, and she desired to lose no time in beginning to pack, for she had made up her mind not to remain at the lodge an hour longer than was necessary, now that Vansittart had so clearly intimated his desire to be rid of her.

Accordingly she went to her own room, and was there when the sound of falling glass attracted her attention. In a moment she had blown out her candle, and advanced with noiseless footsteps into the hall, and it was then that she heard a man's voice, and recognized it at once as Vansittart's.

Her surprise—for she had supposed him to be rendered virtually helpless, at least for a few days—did not deprive her of self-possession.

She ran swiftly upstairs, and into the room where Rosalind was slowly drawing on her cloak, while Sir Kenneth leant against the mantelpiece, his eyes fixed gloomily on the ground. He looked up as Diana came in, and was a little startled at the alarm painted on her face.

"Vansittart is here," she breathed, quickly, "and his accomplice, Gaston, is with him."

"Well?" demanded Sir Kenneth, "what of that?"

"Only that you are in peril, and I wish to put you on your guard. Vansittart will not stick at a trifle, as you may or may not be aware, and the blow you struck him he is not likely to forget. Are you armed?"

"Armed?"

"Yes!" impatiently. "Have you a revolver, or weapon of any kind?"

"Certainly not," answered the Baronet, promptly, and with a contemptuous laugh. "But for all that I am not afraid of Pierce Vansittart."

"Recollect it will be two to one."

"I am quite ready to face the odds. Besides, I think you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. Vansittart will not put himself in peril for the sake of wreaking a private spite."

Diana shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"You don't know him, or you would not say that. As a rule, he is prudent enough, but when his blood is up he becomes reckless. For Heaven's sake come to terms with him, if possible."

The words were hardly out of her mouth when Vansittart pushed open the door, and stood for a moment on the threshold, almost stupefied by astonishment at the sight of the persons within—Diana, whom he imagined to be at York—Sir Kenneth, who was the last man in the world he was prepared to meet!

The Baronet looked at him with measureless scorn, and after a moment spoke.

"You are surprised to see me here, Mr. Pierce Vansittart? You thought you had laid your plans too well for the possibility of their miscarrying. Man—man"—the Baronet's voice became deep and solemn—"did it never enter into your calculations that there is an all-seeing Providence above, whose mission it is to protect the innocent from the snares of the wicked? Did you think that you could defy God and man alike with impunity?"

The sound of his voice seemed to break the spell that had fallen upon Vansittart, and he advanced farther into the room, Gaston following, and looking with undiguised curiosity from one to the other of the trio.

"I am surprised to see you under my roof!" declared Vansittart, with unblushing effrontery, "and I cannot pretend to give you a welcome either. In point of fact, I must request you to leave this house with as little delay as possible."

"You need not impress that upon me. My desire to leave is to the full as great as yours to be rid of me. Come Rosalind," turning to his wife, "are you ready?"

"Quite," she said, shrinking timidly to his side.

"Stay a moment!" cried Vansittart, the evil glitter that Rosalind had learned to know coming in his eyes. "I said I desired your absence, Sir Kenneth, but this lady will not accompany you."

"This lady is my wife," returned the

Baronet, with contemptuous hauteur, "and she will leave this house under my protection."

"You have suddenly awoke to your rights as a husband," was the sneering remark. "You waited until you saw them menaced before you thought well to assert them!"

"I owe no explanation to you, Pierce Vansittart, but, all the same, I take this opportunity of telling you that your vile insinuations have carried no more weight with them than chaff before the wind. More than that, if you think the insults you have offered Lady Hawtrey will pass unavenged, you are woefully mistaken. You shall answer to the laws of your country for your unparalleled villainy."

Sir Kenneth's eyes flashed as he said this, and, almost unconsciously, he held out his arm, through which Rosalind slipped her own. She knew he would have done as much for any woman who needed his protection, as he was now doing for her; and yet, in spite of this knowledge, her heart thrilled at the mere sense of his presence. And as she looked into his face, and at his tall, stalwart form, she wondered whether the world held such another perfect man!

Vansittart laughed scornfully. Knowing that this time to-morrow he should be well out of England, Sir Kenneth's threats did not trouble him in the smallest possible degree.

"Very well," he said, "do your worst, and let all the world know how you and your wife parted on your wedding day. It will not affect me, although it will hardly be pleasant for you. Very few people's lives will bear the strong light of a law court, and it is not likely yours is any exception to the rule."

"You judge Sir Kenneth by yourself," said Diana Blackmore, speaking now, for the first time, in deliberate accents. "There are reasons why you should dread trial in a court of law, because the end of it would be—the scaffold!"

He turned upon her savagely, his face blanched to an awful whiteness. The housekeeper had counselled prudence to Sir Kenneth, which she herself had been unable to follow. Her anger and rage with Vansittart culminated when he announced his intention of not letting Rosalind go, and hurried her into a declaration that she had not intended making until to-morrow.

"Hold your tongue, will you!" he exclaimed.

"No, for the time has come when I shall speak. Hear me, Sir Kenneth—hear me, Lady Hawtrey," she exclaimed with growing excitement, while her voice rang out loud and clear. "I denounce this man as a murderer—the murderer of his wife's nephew, Willie Noel!"

"It is a lie!" came from Vansittart's white lips, while the others drew back with a simultaneous exclamation of horror.

"It is the truth, and I will prove it."

"And get hanged for your pains!" he hissed.

"No, I have turned Queen's evidence, and shall have a free pardon, or if I do not I don't much care, for—her voice grew fiercer as she addressed him—"a few years' imprisonment will be of small account compared with my delight at revenging myself on you!"

This was a blow for which Vansittart had not bargained. Most solemnly had this woman sworn never to betray him, and he had imagined that fears for her own safety would be all-powerful in making her keep her oath. But he had not made allowance for one important element in her nature. He forgot that—

"Heaven holds no rage like love to hatred turned, And Hell no fury like a woman scorned!"

After this avowal, he felt it would be absurd to persevere with his purpose of forcing Rosalind to accompany him to America, for what would there be to prevent her denouncing him, now that he had heard the housekeeper's accusation?

"Come, Gaston," he said, turning to his companion, with a forced laugh. "We must acknowledge ourselves beaten, and we will leave Lady Hawtrey to make up her differences with her husband, and Mrs Blackmore in

possession of the Lodge. There is no object in our remaining now."

"On the contrary," said Sir Kenneth, in a very determined voice, as he shook his arm free from Rosalind, and came forward. "You will remain here until this accusation of your housekeeper has been thoroughly investigated. Your wife is now suffering under the suspicion of having murdered her nephew, and it is my duty, as a magistrate holding the Queen's commission, to see that the guilty person should be brought to justice, and the innocent cleared of a groundless suspicion. You will, therefore, consider yourself under arrest, and I call upon your companion, whoever he may be, to help me in enforcing my words."

Vansittart glared round like a wild beast brought to bay. He was fully aware that Gaston had shrunk from his side; and the movement, as well as the man's face, warned him he could not count on assistance from that quarter.

Gaston was quite ready to help so long as he ran no particular peril himself, but when it came to a question of aiding a murderer to escape he drew back, with a very natural consideration for his own safety.

That Sir Kenneth had every intention of detaining him as prisoner Vansittart had no doubt. His one hope was, therefore, to escape, and get on board his yacht. Once there he would have a good start of his pursuers, and might succeed in getting away. It was his only chance.

In a moment he had drawn from an inner breast-pocket a revolver that glittered like silver in the light of the lamp. He pointed it full at Sir Kenneth—pulled the trigger, and fired!

A woman's shriek rang out, wild and piercing; and when the smoke cleared away Rosalind was clinging round her husband's neck, the blood flowing copiously from a wound in her breast.

On seeing Vansittart aim the pistol she had flung herself across Kenneth's body, determined to give her life for his!

CHAPTER XLI.

FORGIVEN.

SIR KENNETH'S horror, as he held his wife's apparently lifeless body in his, and saw the blood trickling down her dress, may be imagined better than described. Heedless of everything else in the excitement and agony of the moment, he laid her down on a couch, and, falling on his knees beside her, implored her to speak to him, while he pressed between his own one heavy hand, and carried it passionately to his lips.

In that supreme moment he forgot the gulf lying between them, and only remembered that this was the woman whom he had loved, and who was bound to him by the closest tie humanity knows. Moreover, it was to save his life that she had sacrificed her own.

In the excitement, Vansittart and Gaston left the room, and Diana hurried forward, and at once cut away the blood-soaked clothing from the wounded girl, and laid bare the wound—which proved to be in the left shoulder.

"Go away," she said to Sir Kenneth. "I have been a nurse, and if you will let me come I will staunch the blood. If you have a linen handkerchief tear it up into strips, and make me a bandage."

Half dazed he obeyed, and she took his place; and soon, by dint of her exertions, the blood ceased flowing, and Rosalind opened her eyes.

"Kenneth!" she exclaimed, feebly "are you there—are you safe?"

"Yes—to both questions," he answered, in a choked voice.

She seemed satisfied, and once more closed her eyes, while Diana rose from her knees, and beckoned the Baronet aside.

"You must go for a doctor. I am a nurse, but my work is now done, and it requires a surgeon to extract the bullet."

"One moment!" exclaimed Sir Kenneth, whose haggard face testified to his mental anxiety. "Can you tell me if the wound is serious?"

"No, I don't know," she answered, evasively, "because I do not know whether the bullet has penetrated any vital part. It is quite possible that there may be internal hemorrhage, and, if so, little can be done. However, a surgeon alone can tell if that is the case."

She gave him the necessary directions, and he went downstairs, and let himself out of the front door, which was open, and there, to his immense surprise, he was met by Mr. Causton, who looked flurried and anxious. In order to account for this, it must be explained that the lawyer had not been able to enter the house, in consequence of Vansittart having taken the precaution, after his own entrance, of closing the shutters of the conservatory door. Thus Mr. Causton was forced to remain outside, and he had been a witness of the hasty exit of Pierce Vansittart and his companion, Gaston. More than this, he had heard the conversation that took place between them, and it had upset his equanimity very considerably.

"One moment, if you please, sir," Gaston had said, as he found himself in the open air. "As things have turned out I must refuse to accompany you to America—or anywhere else, for that matter."

"What!" Vansittart returned with a smile that was bitterer than a sneer. "So you are one of those rats that desert a sinking ship!"

"I have myself to think of, you must remember, Mr. Vansittart, and though I'm not over careful as a rule, I draw the line at murder."

"Hush!" interrupted the other. "Don't let that word pass your lips. Surely you will help me to pull as far as Gravesend?"

"No, sir, I cannot."

"Not if I give you twenty—fifty—a hundred pounds for your services?"

The man hesitated. His cupidity was awakened; nevertheless prudence finally triumphed, and he shook his head.

"Not even for that, sir. I've kept out of the clutches of the law so far, and I'll continue to do so if I can. If no one but you and me knew of what that woman said it would be all right; but you see there's Sir Kenneth Hawtrey, and he's a ticklish customer. Besides, there'll be the deuce to pay over taking away his wife from the White House, and—well, altogether, I think I'd better make myself scarce. I'll wish you good-night, sir, and you have my best wishes for your escape. Whatever you may have been to other people you've paid me well, and I have no desire to see a rope round your neck." And, thus saying, Gaston turned quickly, and tramped away in the darkness.

Vansittart remained for a moment in deep thought; then, with a curse, turned on his heel, and walked down the garden. Causton, meanwhile, was a prey to conflicting feelings. From what he had heard he gathered that Vansittart was the author of some terrible crime, which he naturally connected with the pistol shot he had heard, and it was clearly his duty not to let him escape. But, after all, what could he do? Vansittart was a much stronger and bigger man, and in all probability was armed. The lawyer anathematized his own foolishness for having, when he changed his clothes that evening, forgotten to take his revolver out of his coat pocket. With that in his hand he would have taken upon himself the arrest.

As it was he followed Vansittart down the garden, saw him go down the steps, and get into a boat, and then pull away with rapid strokes down stream. Causton knew that his destination was Gravesend, and he reflected that there might still be time to capture him

if he went to the nearest police station, and gave his description to the superintendent.

This he resolved to do, and it was on his return from the river that he met Sir Kenneth, leaving the house.

The Baronet did not stay to ask him what brought him there—time was too precious to waste in such questions—but a sudden idea struck him. In leaving the two women alone there was a certain amount of risk, and the presence of Causton would be a sort of safeguard.

"Go upstairs at once, and into the room on the right of the passage," he said, hastily. "My wife is there, and another woman. Look after them till I come back with a doctor. I will explain all presently."

Too many strange events had happened on this eventful night to leave Mr. Causton any further capacity for surprise. He said nothing, but entered the house, and had no difficulty in finding the room indicated, for a thin line of light came through the interstices of the door, and guided him.

The sight that met his gaze when he went in was one to be remembered. Rosalind lay motionless on the couch, so pale and still that she might have been a marble statue, or—yet more ominous suggestion!—a corpse.

On the other side of the room, close to the fireplace, stood Diana Blackmore, with her back towards him. Unknown to Vansittart, she was aware of the existence of the safe in the wall, and it will be remembered that she now possessed his keys.

Having got rid of Sir Kenneth, she proceeded to execute the purpose that had been in her mind ever since Vansittart's departure—for she was resolved not to leave the lodge empty-handed, and there was the chance of finding either money or valuables in this secret hiding-place.

She opened the safe easily enough, and so absorbed was she in her search that she did not hear the entrance of the lawyer—whose movements, at all times, were essentially catlike. Something in her attitude and occupation aroused his detective instincts, and he crept noiselessly behind her, and looked over her shoulder.

Suddenly his expression changed, and in the intensity of his excitement he gave vent to an exclamation that had the effect of making Diana turn round,—for once startled out of her ordinary calm. She had not counted on interruption, for she knew quite a quarter-of-an-hour must elapse before Sir Kenneth could return, and her sagacity told her that there was no danger of Vansittart venturing back.

Causton took no notice of her. His eyes were riveted on a peculiarly shaped iron-box, deposited in the very middle of the safe, and engraved on the cover with two initials, "W. N."

This box had been described to him twice—once by Nona, and once by Claud, and his recognition of it was instantaneous. Here was the all-important clue—the clue which he had hardly dared hope to find!

Once more his gaze fell on Rosalind, and then came back to the housekeeper. He laid his hand heavily on her arm.

"Do you see that box?" he said, pointing to it. "If you tell me truly who placed it here, I promise to give you a reward of fifty pounds."

"I would have told you without the reward," she answered, quietly; "but before I do so, be good enough to explain to me who you are."

"I am a friend of Sir Kenneth Hawtrey's. It was he who directed me to come here, and look after his wife until he comes back with the doctor."

"And pray what interest have you in that box?"

"One that concerns other people more vitally than myself. There has been a murder committed, and the man—for of course no woman could have done it—who brought that

box here is, in all probability, the guilty person."

Diana started back, her face growing a little pale, while her hands twitched nervously.

"Who—what murder?" she gasped, hoarsely.

"One of which you must have heard. A gentleman named Fulke Marchant was killed at Crowthorne—ah!" as she gave a little cry, "you evidently know a good deal about it."

A few moments, and she had partially gained her composure.

"I know no more about it than the newspapers have told me, but I have seen Captain Marchant once or twice, and if what you say be true, I have seen his murderer as well. That box could have been placed here by no one save Pierce Vansittart."

Pierce Vansittart—Nona's husband!

A sudden flood of light broke on the lawyer. Strange that the name of Pierce Vansittart had never once suggested itself to him!

"And Lady Hawtrey! Does she know anything about it?"

"Lady Hawtrey!" repeated Diana, in surprise. "No, I should imagine not. What made you suppose such a thing?"

But Causton was saved from the awkward necessity of giving his reasons by the entrance of Sir Kenneth, who came in breathless with the haste he had made. The doctor would follow as soon as he had completed a hasty toilet—for he had been awake from his slumbers by Sir Kenneth's summons, and was inclined to resent it.

As if some magnetic current flowed from him to her, Rosalind's lids slowly raised themselves at the Baronet's approach—and oh! what a light of devoted love shone in those dark eyes!

"Kenneth—my husband!" she whispered, holding out her hand. "Am I forgiven at last? If I die will you think of me, not as one who sinned, but one who repented?"

He said nothing, but knelt at her side, and bent his face over her hand. At last he was convinced of her love, and more than that, of his own, but words to tell her this would not come.

"Speak to me," she went on, feebly. "Tell me at least that you believe in my repentance. I shall die happy in that knowledge."

"Do not talk of dying, Rosalind! Ah, my love, my darling, the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I see now that love is strong as death—stronger, for I will not let you die. You shall live for me and happiness!"

Into her face there leapt the glad radiance of a perfect content. Her breath came quicker—in short, detached gasps—and she gave a quick cry of rapture.

"I am pardoned, and you love me! The joy of a lifetime is in those words. Put your arms round me, Kenneth—kiss me, for the first time since our marriage!"

He obeyed—heedless of those two onlookers whose presence he had indeed forgotten; and he held her close to his breast, while he rained down kisses on lips and brow, murmuring the while the sweet words of love that thrilled her with a very ecstasy of delight. And in the joy of that supreme moment, even the shadow of that dark presence which hovered near was well-nigh forgotten!

CHAPTER XLII., AND LAST.

BUT Rosalind did not die, after all. The surgeon, when he came, declared her to be faint and weak from loss of blood, but of the internal hemorrhage, at which Diana had hinted, there was no fear. The bullet had lodged in the fleshy part of the shoulder, and was extracted without much difficulty; and Sir Kenneth had a very shrewd suspicion that the housekeeper had been perfectly aware there was no danger, and had only hurried him off for the doctor, because she

wished to have an opportunity of inspecting the contents of the safe.

Of the iron box Mr. Causton at once took possession, and with it he marched up to the nearest police-station, where he told his story, and applied for—and obtained—a warrant against Vansittart. Two or three policemen were immediately told off to watch the Lodge, and it was intimated to the housekeeper that she would not be permitted to leave until her deposition was taken, and she was bound over to give evidence when called upon to do so.

To this she, perforce, assented, and offered to undertake the task of nursing Lady Hawtrey back to health, for though Rosalind's wound was not in itself dangerous, she was nevertheless so terribly prostrated, and her nerves were so thoroughly out of order from the recent strain upon them, that the medical man declared she must not be moved until she was quite convalescent.

The Baronet, while thanking Diana for her offer, did not think fit to avail himself of it, for his wife was much too precious to be trusted to the care of a woman in whom he could not place implicit confidence. He, therefore, sent for a trained nurse, but the chief part of the nursing he did himself, for he could hardly tear himself from Rosalind's side even for a moment, and he seemed to be trying to make her forget that there had ever been a time in her life when he cared for her less than at present.

"This is our honeymoon!" he whispered, as he sat by the side of the couch, his one hand holding hers, while the other rested on the thick coils of her shining hair; "and we have long arrears of happiness to make up for, you must remember!"

She smiled back an answer of mute content. She sometimes told herself she felt like some shipwrecked mariner who suddenly finds himself in a haven. Her life had been so tempest-tossed that she more than once caught herself wondering whether this calm could indeed be lasting, or whether it was only some happy dream that would dissolve with the light of the morning.

If Mr. Causton had embarked on a mistaken enterprise when his suspicions fastened themselves on Lady Hawtrey, he had at least the satisfaction of knowing that, after all, these suspicions had had the result of putting him on the right track, for otherwise he would never have followed Sir Kenneth to Chiswick, and, in all probability, the existence of the safe would not have been discovered. Diana Blackmore would have taken any portable valuables from it, and would then have re-closed it, and its discovery would have been a remote possibility.

With the housekeeper's aid he was able to give a very minute description of Vansittart, and Diana also suggested that his yacht, which she knew to be lying off Gravesend, should be boarded, and watched. This was done, with the result that a little after day-break Mr. Pierce Vansittart found himself confronted by two quiet-looking men in plain clothes, who asked him to accompany them, and consider himself under arrest on the grave charge of murder.

He did not flinch as they fastened the handcuffs on his wrists, neither did he utter a word in answer to the charge, further than—

"I think you have made a mistake." It is true, they cautioned him that any admissions he made would be used against him, and perhaps prudence counselled silence.

He was brought up before the magistrates the next day, and charged, firstly, with poisoning his wife's nephew, Willie Noel, and, secondly, with firing the shot that killed Captain Fulke Marchant. The former case was dealt with first, and Diana Blackmore was the first witness called.

Her evidence was given with characteristic brevity. She deposed that she had known Pierce Vansittart for many years, and that she had acted as housekeeper to him. Before

that she had been a nurse, and when Mrs. Vansittart's nephew was ill she was sent for to attend to him—Mrs. Vansittart herself being under the impression that she was a trained nurse from one of the London hospitals.

She added that one night when she—Diana—was very tired, Mrs. Vansittart undertook to sit up with the little boy, and to give him his medicine—which was put in a particular place on the mantelpiece, so that the lady, who was blind, might have no difficulty in finding it. There was a bottle of carbolic acid in the room, but that was inside a locked cupboard, and there were no other bottles of any kind in the sick chamber.

Diana went on to say that she threw herself on a couch in the adjoining apartment, but not being able to sleep, got up presently, and returned to the little boy's room in search of a book she had left there. The child was asleep, and Mrs. Vansittart had quitted his side for a moment. It afterwards transpired that she had gone for some knitting, with which to occupy herself during her vigil. The *soi-disant* nurse said, that when she entered the room, she saw Mr. Vansittart in the act of pouring something out of one bottle into another, and that he seemed in a great rage at her entrance, and peremptorily ordered her away.

She obeyed, and returned to her room, and a quarter-of-an-hour after she heard the little boy shriek, and, on hurrying in, found that Mrs. Vansittart had given him carbolic acid instead of his proper medicine—but the carbolic acid was not in its original bottle, but in one exactly resembling that containing the medicine. Moreover, the cupboard in which the acid had been kept had been locked, and she herself had the key, but she was aware that Mr. Vansittart also possessed a key that would unlock it.

After the little boy's death she accused her employer of having purposely poured the poison into another bottle, and substituted that for the medicine, trusting to his wife's blindness, and the fact that she had at the time a bad cold which blunted her sense of smell, for not discovering the deception. He did not deny it, but told witness he would pay her well to hold her tongue; and she, thinking that nothing she could say would bring the dead child back to life, promised to keep silence.

Accordingly, at the inquest, she had said nothing of the cupboard in which the carbolic acid was kept being locked, and nothing of having seen Mr. Vansittart pouring out some liquid in the bedroom; and an open verdict was therefore returned.

At this point, the presiding magistrate asked her if she was not aware that, though an open verdict was returned, suspicion, nevertheless, attached very strongly to Mrs. Vansittart, and she admitted that she knew this; but her brow darkened as she said it, and Causton, who was watching her, decided that she bore no good will to the blind lady.

His idea, indeed, was, that she was *jealous* of Nona, but this he kept to himself.

Diana concluded her evidence by saying that Vansittart agreed to allow her a hundred and fifty pounds a-year so long as she kept silence, and she would have continued to do so if he had not broken faith with her.

"Then," said the magistrate, "it is to revenge yourself on Mr. Vansittart that you have made this tardy confession?"

"Yes," she returned, defiantly. "But I don't see that my motive has anything to do with the value of my evidence."

This was true, for her testimony was in itself sufficient to justify the magistrate in committing the accused for trial, and he did not go into the other charge, as Causton was not quite prepared with his evidence.

Vansittart only once looked up as he was led away, and that was to send one glance at his late housekeeper—a glance so full of venom, that Diana, hardened as she was, put up her hands with a little gasp of fear.

That was the last time she ever saw him

alive, for that same night, a warder going into his cell, found Vansittart stretched on the floor quite dead, and with a long gold pin that he had concealed about his person driven straight to his heart. Death must have been instantaneous, and when the surgeon examined the body of the unhappy man, he was astonished at the force and accuracy with which the blow had been driven home.

So ended a life that began under the brightest auspices, and might have been a blessing to its owner, as well as to his fellow-creatures; but through a selfish indulgence in evil passions, an uncurbed temper, and a reckless pursuit of pleasure, had proved itself a bane to everyone brought within its influence.

He left no confession—no word of farewell—no prayer for forgiveness. He died as he had lived, without a thought for anyone but himself, and it is little wonder that no one followed him to his unhallowed grave.

And yet—so strange is the human heart—that night after he was buried, a woman, dressed in black and deeply veiled, stood for half-an-hour in silent contemplation of the freshly-turned soil, and when she left she placed upon it a bunch of roses—not white—that would have been mockery—but rich-hued crimson blossoms, whose scent hung heavy on the air.

Perhaps she had loved him, "not wisely, but too well."

Our story draws to an end. There is little more to tell, for now that Causton had proved to his own satisfaction that Vansittart was the murderer of Fulke Marchant, he was not long in getting together such evidence as justified him in demanding Claud Trevelyan's release.

Gaston came forward and told how he had been employed with another man by Vansittart, to take Nona from the White House; and how, through not knowing the lady, he had mistaken Rosalind for her, and, after drugging her, carried her off to Chiswick.

That was on the night of the murder, and Vansittart had been absent in the country, and had not returned until the next day.

His destination was proved by the return half of a ticket bearing date the day of the murder, which he had not used, and which was found in his waistcoat pocket—for as we know, he came back by a different route, so as to try and avoid suspicion. Then, again, his revolver was examined, and the bullet extracted from Marchant's body was found to correspond exactly with those in it; added to which Rosalind was enabled to testify that she had seen Vansittart put the iron box in the safe—and this evidence was held to be conclusive.

Accordingly, Claud was liberated, and drove away from the W— goal in Squire Charlton's landau, where he was seated side by side with the Squire himself, and opposite to Edith and Nona Vansittart.

When they got to Crowthorne they found the village quite *en fête*, for the news of Claud's release had spread like wildfire, and the people all turned out of their cottages to catch a glimpse of him, and cheer him as he passed.

He bowed right and left in acknowledgment of their greetings, and looked so radiant and handsome, so full of delight at his new-found liberty, that one of the women said to another—

"No need to tell me he's innocent! No man with a face like that—as gay and blithe and open as a spring morning—could commit the crime of murder," and this correctly represented the idea of her neighbours.

Edith was very silent during that drive. Her heart was too full for words, but she feasted her eyes with the delight of watching that dear face, all the dearer because of the tribulation through which its owner had passed.

In Claud's pocket—the left-hand breast pocket, of course—reposed a letter she had

written him—such a sweet, loving, frank, and yet maidenly letter!—expressing her remorse for ever having doubted him, and assuring him of her love and constancy.

This letter had been written immediately after Nona's explanation, and, when the young man read it, it seemed as if summer sunshine had suddenly burst through the sullen clouds of a wintry day!

It was arranged that the two young people should be married with as little delay as possible; in fact, the only thing Edith stipulated for, was that the ceremony should not take place until her dear Rosalind was well enough to assist at it.

Lady Hawtrey, when she had the letter telling her this, wrote back that the wedding might be fixed for a month hence, for she was getting strong as rapidly as she could.

"There is no medicine like happiness," she added. "And, moreover, it has all the effect of novelty for me. Oh, Edith! my husband is so good to me, so thoughtful, so chivalrous, so noble! I never can express his kindness, or my gratitude. My whole life will be devoted to proving it!"

One reason why Cland wished the wedding to be very soon was on account of Nona's eyesight. While she was at the White House a famous London oculist had said there was a possibility of her recovering her sight if she remained in a darkened room, and took proper measures; but since Cland's apprehension she had quite forgotten herself, and her anxiety on his behalf had made her neglect all precautions on her own.

It was certain, too, that the success of her treatment depended much on her having some kind female companion at hand to supply the place Rosalind formerly occupied, and who so fitted or eager to undertake the task as warm-hearted little Edith?

And so on a sunny day in the early spring time, when the sky was blue, and the trees were covered with the soft green shadows of the young leaves, Cland led his girl bride to the altar, and in the little village church of Crowthorne, where she had been christened and confirmed, she took the vows that made her a wife.

Need to say the church was full of people, and odorous with the scent of many thousands of flowers, and the sweetest flower of all was Edith herself—pale, and a little tremulous, but very happy withal.

An ideal bride too, in her sweeping robes of ivory satin, with a diadem of orange blossoms, and a necklace of pearls that an empress might have envied!

This was the gift of Sir Kenneth and Lady Hawtrey—both of whom were at the wedding, Rosalind looking very beautiful in a wonderful dress of some gorgeous gold brocade, that suited her imperial style of beauty to perfection.

But of all that wedding cortege no one was looked upon with more interest than the blind lady, very simply and quietly dressed, who came up the aisle leaning on Equire Charlton's arm.

Nona's gift to the newly-wedded pair was a magnificent one, being nothing more nor less than a fine house in Park lane, which she bought and presented to them as a town residence.

But all this took place two years ago, and now Nona has regained the sight of one eye—the other is injured too much to ever recover—and has embarked on her long-cherished plan of building a hospital for children, as a memorial of her little dead nephew, Willie Noel.

May her undertaking have all the success it deserves!

There is a sturdy little heir at King's Royal now, and Rosalind is the happiest of young mothers—if we except Edith, whose fair little baby girl is quite as pretty as herself.

And now a word for Mr. Canston, whose business carried him very frequently to Devonshire after the "Crowthorne murder case" was over, and who paid many visits to

Weir Cottage, the result of which eventually converted pretty Janet into Mrs. Canston!

The lawyer's cynicism seemed to die a natural death on his wedding-day, and he has never had cause to regret the chance that sent him in search of Sir Kenneth on that windy winter night, when, for the first time in his life, he was struck with Cupid's golden shaft!

[THE END.]

FACETIE.

DESIGNS IN JEWELLERY.—Scheming for an engagement ring.

A PHILADELPHIA umbrella firm has suspended with nothing laid by for a rainy day.

"One good turn deserves another," remarked the cook as she gave the griddle-cake a flip over.

SOME people get so accustomed to eating *table d'hôte* dinners that they take them as a matter of course.

A PHYSICIAN has discovered that the older a man grows the smaller his brain becomes. This explains why the young men know everything and old men know nothing.

We asked a toper to other day,
And asked it without guile,

"If asked to drink, what would you say?"
He answered: "I should smile."

SOME people pretend that they are never surprised at anything, but even the most obstinate of them finds it difficult to conceal his amazement when he runs his nose against a door-edge in the dark.

A PUZZLE to the city of Galveston is how Mr. Grempezyński escaped from an asylum to which he had been sent as a lunatic. Perhaps he unbraided his name and let himself down from a window with it.

FIRST BON VIVANT: "Do you know, Nervely, that glass bottles injure the quality of wine?"
SECOND BON VIVANT (seizing a bottle and an empty glass): "Good heavens! Mr. Knob, is that so? Then we won't let this wine stay in the bottle another minute."

MISS SKEEN: "Where did you graduate from, Mr. Gill?"
MR. GILL: "From the school of pharmacy."
MISS SKEEN (with surprise): "Is it possible? What a strange choice for a young man brought up in the city! But if I remember rightly your grandfather was a farmer, too."

MAIDEN LADY: "I think I will visit a chiropodist while I am in the city."
FRIEND: "Have you corns?"
LADY: "No."
FRIEND: "Bunions?"
LADY: "No."
FRIEND: "Why, then, visit a chiropodist?"
LADY: "I want to have it to say that I had a man at my feet once in my life."

BOARDING-HOUSE MISTRESS: "Well, if you'll agree to make yourself handy, and do all the chores around the house, I'll pay you five dollars a week."
O'Rourke: "Foive dollars a week? Very well, mum. An' as we now do be a strangers, I suppose yez will folly the reg'lar boardin'-house rules, and pay in advance!"

MR. SCHWIRMER (to the young widow of old Otard): "And so you really say, Mrs. Otard, that a girl of twenty can actually be sincere when she says she truly loves a man of fifty?"
MRS. OTARD (indignantly): "Sincere? Of course I do!"
MR. SCHWIRMER: "Oh, thank you! Then maybe there will be some chance for me twenty years hence, after all!"

CHILDREN (to tramp): "Well, you look to me, my friend, as if the freedom of a brewery would be somewhat conducive to your general happiness."
TRAMP: "Yes, I wouldn't mind spending some spare time in such a place if it were well ventilated, and I wasn't interfered with; but, if the matter were left entirely to my own choice, I think I would prefer a distillery."

HE DOESN'T SMOKE.—Mrs. Flysparrow (to new acquaintance): "You seem to be an inveterate lover of the weed, Mr. Nicotine. May I ask if your father smokes?"
MR. NICOTINE: "I trust not, madam. He has been dead some time."

WHY SHE WANTS TO VOTE.—Mrs. Homespun: "I declare I would just like to be able to vote once."
MR. HOMESPUN: "Why, my dear, I thought you were strongly opposed to woman suffrage."
"So I am; and I would like to vote in order that I might vote against the horrid thing."

JUST THE DIFFERENCE.—Gubbins, in one of the rare moments he devotes to the cultivation of his intellect, was reading aloud from a work on natural history. "The camel is an animal that can work a week without drinking." "And I," remarked Gubbins, commenting upon the text, "I am an animal that can drink a week without working."

"MAMMA," inquired Bobby, "do only good little boys go up to Heaven?"
"Yes, dear."
"And bad little boys to the bad place?"
"Yes."
"I'm a good little boy, ain't I?"
"Sometimes, Bobby, and sometimes you are quite a bad little boy." Bobby thought for a moment, and said: "Then I s'pose I'll have to spend part of the time in one place and part of the time in the other."

GREAT CAUSE FOR GRATITUDE.—"Madam, I have come to thank you," murmured a tramp to a Binghampton woman. "What have I done for you?" asked the woman, surprised.
"You refused to give me one of those dumplings you had for dinner yesterday." "Yes, I remember," she replied, impatiently. "And you gave one to an old man who cleaned up your door yard." "True again. He was as industrious as you were lazy, and deserved it." "Madam," continued the tramp, solemnly, "I owe you my life. It killed him."

HE COULDN'T TELL A LIE.—It is an unusual wit which enables its possessor to be as funny in speech as he is on paper. The author of the "Mikado" is evidently ready at any moment to thrust or parry. Once, in leaving a large reception, he stood in the hall, waiting for a servant to bring him his coat and hat. As he lingered there a "heavy swell" descended the stairs, took him for a servant, and called out to him: "Call me a four wheeler!" Mr. Gilbert put his glass in his eye, looked blandly at the young man, and said: "You are a four-wheeler." "What do you mean?" cried the other. "You told me to call you a four-wheeler, and I have done so. I really couldn't call you handsome (handsom), you know!"

LOVE AND SOCIETY.

LOVE cuts up all sorts of monkey-shines; it makes a fool sober, and a wise man frisky.

I don't believe in total depravity. Every man has something in him to show that God made him.

I suppose that one reason why the "road to ruin" is broad, is few accommodate the great amount of travel in that direction.

I think I would rather hear a man brag about himself, than hear him brag all the time of someone else—for I think I like vanity a little better than I do sickofansy.

A humbug is like a bladder—good for nothing till it is blown up, and then ain't good for nothing after it is pricked.

A big nose is ased tew be a sign of genius. If a man's genius lays in his nose, I should say the sign was a good one.

Vanity is seldom malicious.

A woman (like an echo), will hav the last word.

Put an Englishman into the garden of Eden, and he would find fault with the whole blasted concern; put a Yankee in, and he would see where he could alter it to advantage; put a Dutchman in, and he would proceed at once to plant it.

When a man is squandering his estate, even those who are getting it, call him a phool.—JOHN BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

THE Prussian Princesses are said to be greatly pleased with Windsor, and English life and customs, so far. The other day they persuaded their mother to accompany them on a visit to the Windsor shops; and the Empress and her girls were seen on foot in High-street, apparently much interested in a regular shopping excursion.

THERE is not the slightest foundation for the report, which has been widely circulated, that the Queen is, in future, to make an allowance of £30,000 a year to the Prince of Wales. Whenever H.R.H. represents the Queen in any way whatever, the whole of his expenses of every kind are defrayed by Her Majesty.

MUCH anxiety is felt in Russia about the health of the Czarina. Although the real state of affairs is concealed as much as possible, it is now an open secret that she has never recovered the terrible shock to her nerves caused by the recent railway accident.

THE hall at Buckingham Palace is to be fitted with the electric light before next season, but the Queen will not allow this improvement to be introduced into the private apartments at Windsor Castle, as was desired by Sir John Cowell, for Her Majesty prefers shaded lamps and wax candles. The State apartments, the hall, and the lower end of the corridors are fitted with the electric light, but it is to go no further at present.

THE Duke and Duchess of Connaught have arrived at Bombay, where they were met by their children, Princess Margaret and Prince Arthur, who have joined their parents there.

THE two dressing-rooms in the Empress Frederick's suite of apartments in the Lancaster Tower, at Windsor Castle, are hung with family portraits, including the late Emperor William, by Angeli—an admirable likeness; the Emperor Frederick, painted for the Queen in 1867; the present German Emperor, painted in 1872; the late Prince Frederick Charles, the Emperor Maximilian, Princess Frederick Charles, and a charming picture representing the late Princess Alice, with her three eldest daughters, who are now respectively Princess Louis of Battenberg, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna of Russia, and Princess Henry of Prussia. The Empress Frederick's sitting-room, which is hung with old tapestry, has one very large window, from which there is one of the finest views in the private apartments of the Castle, as it is exactly opposite to the Long Walk. The bedroom and dressing-rooms are simply decorated in white and gold.

ST. PETER'S CHURCH, Eaton-square, was crowded to witness the marriage of Captain the Hon. Edward B. Stopford, second son of the Earl of Courtown, with Isabel, daughter of the late Captain Barrington Dashwood. The bride was attired in white brocade satin, the front being richly trimmed with old Brussels lace (her mother's gift), and a few sprays of orange blossoms in her hair were covered with a tulle veil, fastened by diamond stars. Six bridesmaids were in attendance, wearing Directoire dresses of cream cloth, with vests embroidered in brown and gold, over tan-coloured silk petticoats; brown hats, turned up with cream, and trimmed with tan ribbon and wings. Each wore a gold and silver grenade (the badge of the bridegroom's regiment) brooch, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a bouquet of tan obrysanthemums. Mrs. Dashwood, mother of the bride, was elegantly dressed in black velvet, with petticoats and waistcoat of white velvet, trimmed with black passementerie, and black bonnet with white feathers. The Countess of Malmesbury looked well in black brocade velvet, bordered with sable tails, and bonnet of Parma violets. The bride's travelling dress was tailor-made, and of brown cloth, with hat to match, and brown travelling cloak, bordered with skunk.

STATISTICS.

THERE are, in North America, about 300,000 persons keeping bees. The annual honey product is about 100,000,000 pounds. The annual wax product is about 500,000 pounds, and its value more than £20,000.

THE railroads of the world are to-day worth from five to six thousand million pounds. This, probably, represents one-tenth of the total wealth of civilised nations, and one-quarter, if not one-third, of their invested capital. It is doubtful whether the aggregate plant used in all manufacturing industries can equal it in value. The capital engaged in banking is but a trifle beside it. The world's whole stock of money of every kind—gold, silver, and paper—would purchase only a third of its railroads.

GEMS.

WHEN a man has no desire but to speak plain truth he may say a great deal in a very narrow space.

ALL laws are made by old men. Young men and women lean towards exceptions; old men alone abide by rule.

A FRIENDSHIP that makes the least noise is very often the most useful; for which reason I should prefer a prudent friend to a zealous one.

HASTE and rashness are storms and tempests, breaking and wrecking business; but nimbleness is a full fair wind, blowing it with speed to the haven.

THE immorality of the age is a standing topic of complaint with some men. But if any one likes to be moral, we can see nothing in the age to prevent him.

IT is the habitual thought that frames itself into our own life. It affects us more than our intimate social relations do. Our confidential friends have not so much to do in shaping our lives as thoughts have which we harbour.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRIED CHICKEN.—Put in a frying-pan a tablespoonful each of butter and lard, lay in the chicken cut open on the back; season with pepper and salt, and fry brown; take the yolk of an egg, beat, add one cup of milk, and thicken with flour; stir into the fat, and pour over the chicken when ready to serve.

DRESSED EGGS.—Boil until hard half-a-dozen eggs, and when cold take off the shells, cut the eggs in half and take out the yolks. Mash the yolks, season them with salt, pepper and mustard, and mix with some boiled ham chopped fine. Then fill the whites with this, and set these halves in the oven to brown.

CHICKEN SALAD.—Mince the meat of a chicken fine; then chop the white parts of celery, and prepare a dressing as follows:—Rub the yolks of two hard-boiled eggs smooth; to each yolk put one tablespoonful of made mustard, half as much salt, two raw eggs, a small glass of strong vinegar, and a teaspoonful of the best olive oil. Put the celery in a salad bowl; lay the chicken on that, and then pour over it the dressing.

CORN MEAL SALLY LUNN.—Two cups of Indian meal, one cup of flour, two eggs, one tablespoonful of lard, one quart of boiling water, one cup of milk, one tablespoonful of sugar, one-half of a yeast cake dissolved in a little warm water, one teaspoonful of salt. Scald the meal with the water, and while hot work in the lard, sugar, and salt. Let it get almost cold before adding the milk, flour, yeast and eggs. Let it rise over night in the pan on which it is to be baked. The success in making it depends on the mixing and beating.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PENALTIES OF ROYALTY.—The number of degraded people trying to gain access to the Emperor of Germany, is remarkable. Hardly a day passes without such an occurrence. The other day two such unfortunates entered the palace simultaneously. It was a man and a woman. The latter was the wife of a poor boatman, asserting that she was a near relative of the Emperor's, and had to see him after years of absence. The man was well dressed, with a look of distinction about him, and a flow of white hair on his head and long whiskers, altogether a venerable looking, sympathetic figure. He said he had engaged to marry the daughter of the King of Italy, and being a German and a subject of the Emperor, he had to obtain his Majesty's permission before perfecting the marriage. Both persons were taken to the insane ward of the Hospital of the Charité at Berlin.

EATEN WITH THE FINGERS.—A question often repeated is this, "What shall I eat with my fingers?" Although it is considered vulgar to be seen picking a bone, we have lately observed very well-bred people take the leg of a little bird in the fingers and delicately remove the flesh with the teeth. It is not generally done, but it can be done neatly. Cheese can be eaten from the fingers, and so with all the fruits; a very dry little tart or a cake can be eaten with the fingers. Asparagus is also conveyed to the mouth with the fingers. Many English gentlemen eat lettuce and celery, with salt alone, with the fingers. Olives are also eaten in the same way. Pastry, hard ice cream, jellies, blanc mange, and puddings are eaten with the fork. The dessert-spoon is only used for soft custards and preserved fruit, or melons which are too soft for the fork. When strawberries are served with the stems on they should be eaten with the fingers; when served hulled and creamed they should, of course, be eaten with a spoon.

INFANT MARRIAGES AMONG THE HINDUS.—These infant marriages are the root of the social evils of the Hindu system. A child of seven or eight is married, taken from her parents, and brought to the house of her mother-in-law. The English stage mother-in-law is not an agreeable person, but she is amiability personified compared to the actual Hindu mother-in-law. In the presence of this domestic tyrant the poor little child-wife is not permitted to sit down; from morning till night she is employed as a servant in household drudgery. If she complains her murmurs are met with abuse and even blows; not a word of kindness and not a sign of love to cheer her senseless life, and this at an age when impressions are easily formed and when the character is in the course of formation. In some cases the education of the child is continued until ten years of age, and in a few, a very few exceptional cases, longer, but even in the most exceptionally favourable cases it can be but miserably deficient, for the child is a mother before she is fourteen, and then all mental cultivation must of necessity be discontinued, and she sinks into the domestic drudge she is ever to remain, her highest ambition being to get new clothes and jewels, her highest duty to satisfy the animal instincts of her husband. Love, in its higher sense, between husband and wife is unknown; sympathy for and interest in the husband's pursuits, interchange of ideas, even conversation on ordinary topics, is naturally impossible. At best the husband treats the "partner of his joys and sorrows" as a toy, to be played with in his idle moments, and to be abandoned when it has served its purpose and begins to pall. Under these circumstances it is to be wondered at that the woman sinks to the lowest depth of the moral and intellectual scale, that their conversation is coarse, their instincts bestial and cruel, and their character utterly lacking in any of the restraints imposed by purity, honour or truthfulness?

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. A.—What is known as encaustic painting is really enamelling by fire. It is the revival of an ancient art.

S. W. W.—We can find no reference to the existence of a paper bearing the name given. It doubtless ceased publication some time ago.

K. T. G.—The young man cannot be worth very much if he has behaved to two young ladies as you describe. Have nothing to do with him.

R. V. V.—Swift in his "Gulliver's Travels" gives the name of *Zaboo* to one of a race of brutes having the form and all the vices of man.

N. D.—You mean Santa Cruz, in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. It was in an unsuccessful attack on this place that Nelson lost his right arm.

B. W. G.—1. The literal translation of the phrase is, "one knows a friend in need." It is a version of the proverb, "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

R. S.—If you really wish to destroy the cricket (it is generally considered unlucky to do so) put some very strong snuff about its haunts before you go to bed.

C. G.—The dance of which you speak is a very old-fashioned one, and is seldom seen at the present day. It is not to be found in any of the dance books now published.

M. N.—Get 'a' person thoroughly conversant with piano repairing to attend to the instrument; otherwise it is very likely you will spoil it from a lack of practical knowledge.

P. A.—It is a sign of a weak, peevish nature to be jealous of your younger sister because she is more bright and attractive. You should emulate instead of envying her.

E. P. C.—The fixtures in question belong to the landlord. If you as tenant build a greenhouse on the ground, you cannot remove it when you leave without the landlord's express permission.

L. R.—Liquid ammonia will remove grease spots from cloth; it should be applied with a piece of old cloth, and the spot rubbed hard for a few moments, then sponged with very hot water.

JENNIE.—A gentleman should always give the lady the wall in walking in the streets, and indoors should precede her when going upstairs if the staircase is not wide enough for them to walk side by side.

V. V.—"The Star of India" is a comparatively modern order of knighthood, being instituted in 1861. During the Prince of Wales's visit to India in 1876 he held a Grand Chapter of the Order on the 1st January, 1876.

CESAR.—1. Any good dealer would tell you the market value of the copy of Quintin Matsy's famous picture. All depends on its execution. 2. The 30th of April, 1864, fell on a Monday. 3. Writing fair of its kind.

P. W.—Covent Garden theatre was first opened by Rich on the 7th December, 1732. The new theatre built after the fire in 1856, from designs by Barry, was opened by Mr. F. Gye on the 15th May, 1859, when the opera of "Les Huguenots" was performed.

P. L. W.—The young man seems earnest and straightforward enough. Unless you love some one else, or are quite indifferent to him, you can well afford to wait, being so young, but you ought not to encourage him, unless you really intend to marry him.

A. N. C.—The Thames Embankment was opened by the Prince of Wales on the 19th July, 1870. The footway had been opened for traffic two years previously. The Southern Embankment was finally opened by the Duke of Edinburgh on the 9th May, 1874.

H. H.—The trial of Miss Madeline Smith on the charge of poisoning Emile L'Angelier at Glasgow, took place in July, 1867, and was a "not proven." It is stated that during the time she was awaiting her trial several offers of marriage were made to her.

E. C. G.—Consult a physician immediately. We know so little of your case from the description given, that it would be impossible to recommend any strengthening compound. Your system appears to be completely broken down, and the only resource is that recommended.

F. K.—1. The young lady makes a mistake when she supposes that the present you have given her should be returned in kind. That is not the true idea of present giving. Consequently she may or may not give you something in return. 2. Prove to her the falsity of the reports concerning your constancy by living an upright, honourable life. This is the only way to refute the slanders of your enemies. 3. Excuse the lady's actions on account of the reasons given in reply to your first question above.

T. G. B.—The statue of King James II. in Whitehall Gardens, recently cleaned by a new process, is by Grinling Gibbons, and was finished in 1683. The king is supposed to be pointing towards his former palace. It is a fine work of art, but quite lost in its present position. The statue of Charles I. at Charing Cross is by a French sculptor, Le Sueur, and its history is somewhat romantic. It was erected at the expense of the Howard-Arundel family in 1633. During the Civil War it was sold to John River, a brasier, in Holborn, who had strict orders to break it up; but he concealed it, and showed other pieces of brass as those of which it had been composed. It was replaced in 1678 on a pedestal which is the work of Grinling Gibbons.

K. L. G.—We would advise you to get, if possible, a situation with a good architect. The practical knowledge gained in this way you would find of inestimable value.

LADYBIRD.—Fifteen is rather young for jewellery, but the young lady may wear one or two rings on any finger but the engagement finger, which is the third on the right hand. 2. You write a fashionable, but not very legible hand.

MUSCA.—All but a very few of the common house flies are killed by cold weather. Naturalists claim that the fly swarms of early summer are the progeny of a few individual flies which have survived the winter in some protected nook.

R. S. W.—The choice of business or a profession is a serious matter not to be lightly decided. Unless we had more information as to habits, tastes, general character, and previous training, it would be quite impossible to advise.

G. V.—The literal meaning of the word petroleum is rock oil. It has existed from time immemorial on the shores of the Caspian Sea, in Burmah, and other parts of the world, but its use in this country as an illuminating power is quite recent.

NELLIE.—The highest rank in the British army is field-marshal, then comes general, then lieutenant-general, then major-general. The inferior rank among officers are colonel, and would probably be unintelligible to any but a military man.

THE SPEED OF TIME.

When I was young, Time travelled slow
And crept along with folded wing;
I prayed that he would faster go,
And hurry on the sunny Spring;
And when the early Spring began,
'Twas ages to the genial May;
And then another age must run
Before the Nation's holiday.

When pink-lipped apple-blossoms crowned
The trees with pyramids of snow,
Another age must roll around
Before the ripened fruit would show;
And when the fruit was gathered in,
Ages and ages unto me
Must pass, ere children would begin
To dream about the Christmas tree.

But year by year Time's pace increased,
And soon his restless wings were spread,
His heavy tread on earth had ceased,
He flew triumphant overhead;
Years shrunk to weeks, and weeks to days,
And months and seasons were as one;
December's snow was warmed in May's,
And Christmas blushed in Summer's sun.

And yet content I fain would be;
If good swift passes, evil too
As swiftly flies, and misery
Hath briefer space its ill to do.
So, Time, fly on; I do not heed
How urgently the race is pressed,
Nor care to check thy lightning speed,
For it will bring me peace and rest.

B. J.

C. N. J.—There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip. You were not prompt enough to snatch the prize, and another, with more energy, stepped in. Instead of abusing him you should emulate his activity. If ever such an opportunity occurs again we should say, "Go and do likewise."

C. T. R.—1. Not at all a drawback. Ability is the principal thing required. 2. The most becoming. 3. The "best thing for the complexion and to make the eyes sparkle" is to keep regular hours, live well but simply, use plenty of cold water, and take plenty of outdoor exercise.

C. L. F.—The decoration of dinner-tables is constantly varying. Coloured velvet and satin are no longer used, but their place is taken by Madras clouded muslin, with coloured flowers woven in, in subdued green, blue, and pink. The strip is laid over the cloth, and reaches to almost where the plates are put on.

W. L.—An engagement that has proved so irksome to both parties should be immediately broken. It seems preposterous that at the time of its inception one of the parties to this contract was fifteen and the other seventeen years of age. As a matter of course, such tender children know nothing of the actual meaning of love, and therefore it is not to be wondered at when both agree to disagree. This very sensible conclusion could have been consummated without referring for advice to any outside party. By all means return the presents and loving missives exchanged during the courtship of two years, and then settle down to a more sensible mode of life than that of quarrelling and making-up, like two spoiled children. As for your statement that you can never love again, we can only reply that when you have arrived at years of discretion a much more liberal view of life will be opened up before your vision. There is not the slightest possibility that this "cruel blow" will have any dangerous effects on your constitution, notwithstanding the gloomy forebodings that at present hold possession of your love-sick frame. Take plenty of exercise, eat bountifully of good food, and pay strict attention to your business, and you will survive the terrible ordeal. As for your "lost love," she will doubtless soon recover her wonted good spirits.

W. C. B.—August 19, 1835, fell on Wednesday; September 1, 1837, on Friday.

F. W.—Under the circumstances you did perfectly right. He had no right to attempt any familiarity, and therefore should not feel aggrieved because you so strenuously objected.

E. D.—The dates quoted fell as follows: June 27, 1837, and November 24, 1840, on Tuesday; December 18, 1846, on Friday; November 18, 1867, on Wednesday, and February 28, 1875, on Sunday.

E. V. W.—By washing your hair with a weak solution of borax, the excess of oil in it may be considerably reduced. It must not be used more than once in two weeks; applied oftener, the borax will cause the hair to be crisp, harsh, and very liable to break off or fall out.

L. S. M.—Like yourself, he is afflicted with love sickness, and while in that state cannot be held accountable for many queer antics that would not be exhibited under different circumstances. Forgive him for his forgetfulness, and retain the ring he has given as a token of his love.

S. N. T.—Diligent study and practice will improve your style of playing, and if endowed with a natural aptitude for music, you may, in the course of time, become an excellent performer, but cannot expect to hold as high a rank as those who have been assisted in their studies by eminent teachers.

B. D. D.—One possessing such beautiful eyes, hair—a dark Auburn—and complexion cannot fail to be rated as a remarkably attractive specimen of the gentle sex. Were your eyes of a light or dark blue, you would be ranked among the blonde type of beauty; as it is, demiblonde is the class to which you properly belong.

M. G. T.—Outfits consisting of all the materials required in making wax flowers, and a book of instructions, may be purchased from a dealer in artists' materials. If possible, take a few lessons from one versed in the art, and thus get a knowledge of its rudiments, which are hard to master without such practical instruction.

E. G. W.—1. Sunday, August 5, 1877. 2. Tripoli, rotten stone or jewellers' rouge, mixed with oil, are principally employed in cleaning brass. A ready-made polishing paste, for sale by druggists and hardware dealers, the composition of which is unknown to any one but the manufacturers, produces excellent results.

JANE.—1. You are a demi or half-brunette. If your eyes were black, and complexion a shade darker, you would be classed as brunette. 2. There is no harm in receiving presents from an intimate gentleman friend; but otherwise you would be placing yourself under an obligation to one who is little more than a speaking acquaintance.

J. F. W.—1. Matting may be cleaned by washing it with salt and warm water, using two teaspoonfuls of salt to a gallon of water. Rub dry with clean cloths. 2. A mixture of lemon juice and salt will remove ink stains and iron-rust from linen goods. The spots should be washed in cold water prior to the application of the cleansing mixture.

J. M.—The memory is similar to muscular fibre, in that the more it is cultivated the stronger it becomes, and the more it can be cultivated. Effort is the principal factor in improving the memory, and on it the so-called "systems" are based. The study of languages has been recommended for training the memory. Geometry, as taught in schools and colleges, is also valuable to discipline the memory.

JANEY is engaged to a handsome young man, whom she passionately loves. Her trouble is that she is bitterly jealous. Her fiancé is fond of talking to other girls, and when she sees him doing this she "feels," she says, "as though her heart were breaking." This jealous tendency is very unfortunate, but it is a real, inborn evil in some people. They try conscientiously, desperately, to get the better of it, but it is as hard to kill as the hydra-headed snake. Lack of self-appreciation and personal pride is one cause of it. Try to cultivate a higher appreciation of yourself, a prouder self-valuation. Of course you must struggle against the jealous passion. Your fiancé is probably only acting out his lively social nature. You ask, "Shall I tell him how I feel about the matter or shall I keep my secret?" Keep it by all means. Never let him know you doubt his faith. That is the best way to put irritation into his head, and create the very evil whose shadow troubles you now. It is time to speak to him when you know he is unfaithful.

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